

**SCHOOL OF PLANNING AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS
UNIVERSITY OF IOWA**

URP:6203 THE MAKING OF CITIES; HISTORIES AND THEORIES OF PLANNING

ASSIGNMENT TITLE: COMPARATIVE NEIGHBORHOOD STUDY

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Introduction

Human settlements typify organisms in their basic sense. It is deemed as an organism because it is birthed, grows, flourishes, and, in some cases, subsequently delays. It exhibits a character that either attracts people or repels them. Moreover, human settlements do not exist in isolation from one another; they co-exist in an interrelated system that promotes supportive structures that balance their functions to promote development. Notwithstanding, people are at the center of the purpose of planning and establishing human settlements; hence, it basically finds its essence in promoting public health, safety, and well-being. By and large, some key interrelated principles/factors that support the realization of this purpose are convenience, safety, harmony, economy, and aesthetics. In this context, convenience ensures that people can move around their neighborhoods and/or cities conveniently, at a reasonable distance to various activity areas. Furthermore, safety promotes safe living environments by ensuring safe road designs and building designs, among other factors. Harmony, conversely, ensures various land uses are zoned at reasonable locations with compatible land uses so that they do not create inconvenience for other land uses. The principle of economy basically ensures that neighborhood design implementation is economically viable from the perspective of both the cities and the residents. Moreover, aesthetics promotes the beauty of a place. It is evident that these issues are critical for the livability of a neighborhood and the quality of life of the residents.

Moreover, from a broader perspective, the functionality of the places encompasses all these factors. In this essence, neighborhoods should be able to support at least the basic needs of the residents. As a matter of fact, the character of neighborhoods usually reflects the nature of the residents in terms of history, race, level of education, population structure, religious beliefs, etc. All these factors discussed thus far form a complex, interrelated system that demands great collaboration and coordination to promote the health, safety, and welfare of the people. Hence, this gives rise to urban planning. Urban planning basically prepares for the future growth trajectory of neighborhoods, and planners are responsible for making informed decisions for those future actions since we are dedicated to the management of development and solving problems.

Globally, the most prominent tools planners use to manage land development are zoning ordinances, subdivision regulations, and building codes. Iowa City is no exception. Aside from the planning district in Iowa City, neighborhoods are lower-level planning areas that guide the

planning and management of the city. All these neighborhoods are captured in the Iowa City comprehensive adopted in 2013 which is still in full effect. Nevertheless, monitoring and evaluation are crucial parts of the planning process as they ensure that we appreciate the progress or, otherwise, our plans. The purpose of this assignment is, therefore, more of a monitoring and evaluation exercise but highly geared toward equipping us with the needed skills to understand the state of neighborhoods in Iowa City and appreciate the quality of life in these neighborhoods.

Methods and Materials

For this study, I selected the Melrose and Creekside neighborhoods. These neighborhoods are selected based on income levels and character; where Melrose is a median-income neighborhood with a median household income of \$32,431, a bit older than Creekside with an average house age of 83 years, and has considerably more cul-de-sac streets. Creekside, on the other hand, is a high-income neighborhood with a median household income of \$71,402, an average house age of 75 years, and generally a grid-iron street pattern. I then visited the two neighborhoods for firsthand information based on direct and careful observations. Primary data for the study was mainly observation presented by pictures and ideas. On the other hand, the secondary data were sourced mainly from the American Community Survey website, Iowa City Comprehensive Plan, Central District Plan, Southeast District Plan, Johnson County Property Explorer, etc.

Organization of report

The report began with the above introduction, which detailed the background and purpose of the assignment, followed by methods adopted that focus on the context and materials used for the study. Moving on, the report details the geographical scope of the study, including the location and certain features of the understudied neighborhoods, in essence, Melrose and Creekside. The next section delves deeply into the objectives of the assignment by doing a situational and comparative analysis of the two neighborhoods on themes such as demography, transportation, safety and security, recreation, etc. The report then concludes with policy recommendations and a conclusion.

Profiles of Melrose and Creekside Neighborhoods

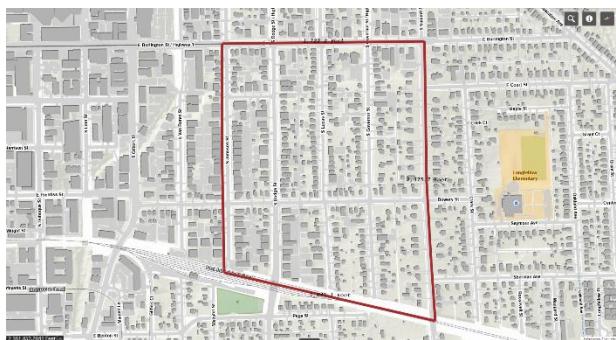
According to Homes.com, Creekside is mainly residential, with most residences built in the post-war 1940s. Being away from the city, the neighborhood was formerly a dairy farm that was converted into a working man's area. So, while homes are on nice-sized lots, they have smaller

bedrooms. There are a variety of aesthetics; midcentury ranches can be found close to duplexes, American Foursquare, split-levels, Dutch Colonial Revivals, and Cape Cods. Detached garages can also be accessed via the alleyways that connect rows of houses, even though many residences have driveways and garages adjacent to them. Three miles to the southwest of the neighborhood is the Iowa City Municipal Airport. The neighborhood is also considerably serviced by several retail centers. Retail centers such as Shakespeare's Bar and Grill; Heyn's Ice Cream; Hy-Vee and Walgreens are situated at the along South 1st Avenue retail center. Other eateries are to the south, such as Jimmy Jack's Rib Shack, 2 Dogs Pub, and Java House Coffee Roasters. Between the restaurants, there is a movie theater and stores like Dollar Tree and Lenoch & Cilek Ace Hardware. The neighborhood is well connected with roads, and it is generally the grid design with two cul-de-sacs. It is located to the east of the Melrose neighborhood which is the other neighborhood for this comparative study. See Figure 1 for a geographical context of the two neighborhoods.

Geographically, Melrose is approximately at the center of everything. It is a small neighborhood with many student/workforce renters and landlord-owned properties; it is walkable from campus and could be described as an extension of the university. Encircled by highways, train tracks, and sports stadiums, it gets loud, but community involvement can also be high. There are not only university activities but city-run events as well. There are great schools nearby, too. The boundaries of the Melrose Neighborhood are Melrose Avenue to the north (to the point where the Melrose Avenue bridge crosses the railroad track), Riverside Drive to the east, and the former Rock Island Railroad to the south. Many food options are nearby, although the neighborhood lacks shops and restaurants. For example, Hudson's Southside Tap serves American favorites, including burgers, wings, fried appetizers, and enormous salads. The neighborhood is also near the Walmart shopping mall in Iowa City. There are parking areas for commuters outside the residences and a tiny church. However, when sporting events occur, the parking lots become the principal gathering place for tailgating. Also, Brookland Park, Alice's Rainbow Childcare Centers, and Preschool are in this neighborhood. Every home is close to the university and the medical facilities and hospitals on campus, which are all accessible by foot. Students walking to and from class during the week might cause traffic jams on the roadways. It is not a grid design and has some dead-end roads with two cul-de-sacs. It is located west of the Creekside neighborhood, which is the other neighborhood for this comparative study. See Plate 1 for a geographical context of the two neighborhoods.

Some striking contrasts emerge from their histories and functions in the city. Creekside and Melrose exude different urban dynamics; the two neighborhoods are 1.1k apart. Built on repurposed farmland after the war, Creekside is mainly of a residential nature with a mixture of architectural styles; its mid-century homes and big lots add to the beauty. An adjacent shopping corridor and linked roadways appreciably provide entertainment and meet the needs of the people. On the flip is the Melrose neighborhood, thriving as a student-centered and high-activity hub. The region is lively and walkable because of its proximity to the university and medical facilities. It, however, faces noise pollution and traffic from passing facilities and athletic activities. While Melrose is bustling with community activities, it has fewer local stores than Creekside and lacks diversity in its retail sector. Both neighborhoods serve different populations. Creekside heavily houses families seeking quiet suburban life, whereas Melrose interests students and renters attracted by the relative ease of access to university facilities and entertainment. Nevertheless, the profiling shows that the two neighborhoods are behaving in relation to some indicators from the Concentric and Sector design models in planning, where the low-income group lives closer to the main activity areas of the city, such as the industrial and central business districts, among others. In this case, the neighborhood closer to these uses usually has a low quality of living experience. This profiling shows Melrose as a neighborhood closer to major public activity areas. However, the analysis will provide credence or otherwise as to whether it exhibits a low quality of living experience or is an exception.

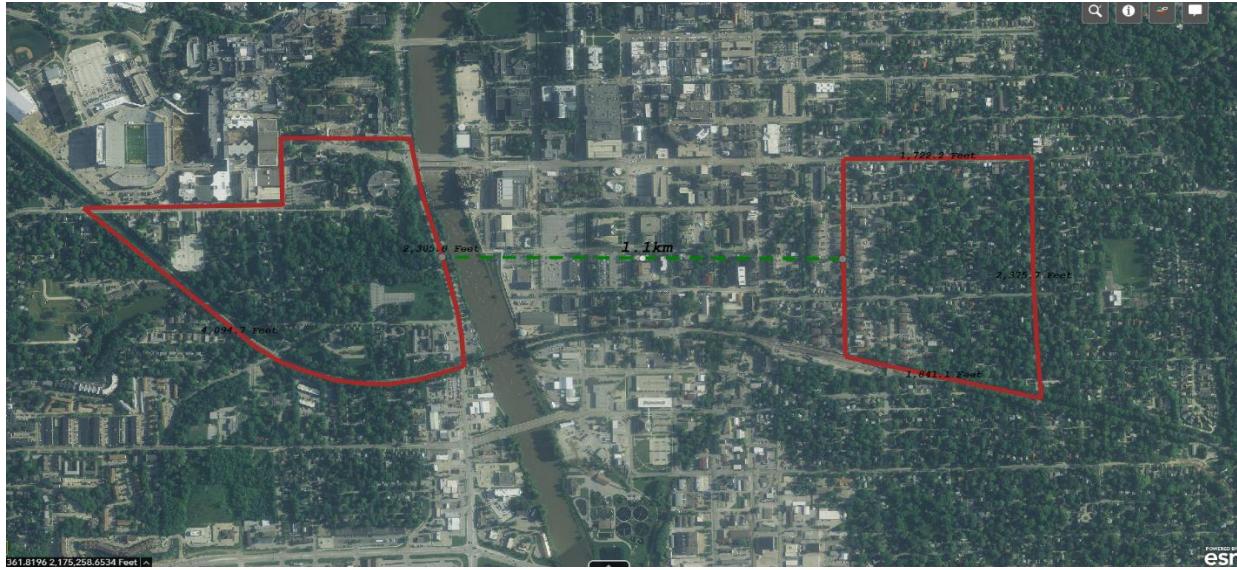
Plate 1, 2 and 3; Melrose & Creekside Neighborhoods in Context



1-Creekside Neighborhood



2-Melrose Neighborhood



3-Creekside and Melrose Neighborhood in context

Source: Johnson County Map viewer

Social structure of the neighborhoods

Having gotten a fair background of the two neighborhoods, it is essential to move into the analysis by understanding the social structure of both neighborhoods. It is evident that the social structure of a place has a significant impact on its spatial structure. Therefore, to do a comprehensive analysis of the neighborhood, it is imperative to understand the structure of the residents to give a glimpse at how the spatial development or spatial structure is the way it is. Below are therefore briefs of the social structure of the two neighborhoods under study.

The Creekside Neighborhood

According to the Social Explorer 2010 (5-years estimate), the Creekside neighborhood, which is block group 1 under census tract 16.02, had a total population of 1,518. Out of this, 54.2% were males while 45.8% were females. However, currently, according to the Social Explorer 2022 (5-year estimates), there are 1,952 people living in the neighborhood, where 47.4% are males and 52.6% are females. This, at a glance, shows a flip in the gender composition of the neighborhood. However, it is typical for an urban area to have more of females than males. Notwithstanding, these fluctuations within 12 years may be explained by the fact that a significant number of people here live temporarily, and the available data to affirm this is home ownership. About 93.2% of the people are renters, while only about 6.8% are living in their own houses. Moreover, on the racial

front, 77.5% of the residents are white, 9.8% black/African American, 5.4% Asian, 2.5% Other race and 4.8% two or more races. This shows that the neighborhood is predominantly white neighborhood. Meanwhile, as of 2010, whites constituted 85% of the population in the neighborhood, while Asians held 13.4% with no black/African American. This shows that the neighborhood has appreciated in terms of racial diversity, which will directly or indirectly impact the neighborhood's development and quality of life.

Furthermore, a larger proportion of the population, 33.5%, falls between the ages of 18 and 34, while 9.4% falls between the ages of 35 and 64. However, no one is aged 65 or above, which highlights the youthful nature of the neighborhood. Relatedly, of the population who falls within 16 and above, 85.5% are classified as being in the labor force, while 14.5% are not in the labor force. Only 0.7% of those in the labor force are unemployed. Most (35%) are employed in the Service Occupations; 27.9% Management/Professional related, 18.3% Production, Transportation, and Material Moving Occupations; 16.9% Sales and Office Occupations; 15.3%; and 1.9% Construction, Extraction, and Maintenance Occupations. Collectively, the inference that can be drawn from this social structure of the neighborhood is that the neighborhood's proximity to the university attracts more of the working class and students. There is an agglomeration of commercial activities around the university that attracts more of the working class and students to nearby neighborhoods like Creekside. This is backed by the fact that about 52% of them travel for less than 5 minutes to their workplace, and only 3.4% travel for more than 45 minutes to their workplace; meanwhile, a significant proportion (19.6%) walk to work. This shows that the Creekside neighborhood serves as a dormitory town for the university and its surrounding economic activity centers.

The Melrose Neighborhood

The Melrose neighborhood is situated in Block Group 1 of Census Track 6. According to the Urban Stats and the Statistical Atlas, the total population of the Melrose neighborhood is 411. Inversely, the total population as of 2010 was 517, a decrease of 20.5% within the last 14 years. According to the Social Explorer 2022 (5-years estimate), 63.6% of the current population are males, while 36.4% are females. This structure was fairly sustained for 14 years, as 63% of the population in 2010 were males while 37% were females. Notwithstanding, the decrease in the population of the neighborhood may be explained by the quality of living in the neighborhood which will be detailed

later. The low quality of the neighborhood obviously serves as a push factor that decreased the interest of people to opt in for the Melrose neighborhood. On the racial front, about 60% of the residents are whites, 14% blacks/African American 15% Asian, and others are 11%. The neighborhood appears more racially diverse than the larger Iowa City with just 8.5% Black/African Americans and 7.9% Asians. Arguably, racial composition may be a key contributing factor to the perception of the quality of the neighborhood.

On the educational front, 34.3% of the population from 25 years and above holds a Bachelor's degree, 27.8% have a diploma, 15.6% have a Master's degree, 8.7% have high school, 7.1% have a Professional degree, 5.7% less than a high school and only 0.8% holds a doctorate. On the other hand, 61% of the residents are between the ages of 18-34, while 18.2% fall between the ages of 35 and 64. And about 5.7% from 18 and below, while 15% were aged 65 and above. For those aged 15 and above, 62.1% have never married, 29.3% are married, 1.9% are widows, and 6.8% are divorcees. The results portray a youthful population. Relatedly, of the population who falls within 16 and above, 74.3% are classified as being in the labor force, while 25.7% are not in the labor force. However, the unemployment rate is 0%. Nevertheless, most (56%) are employed in Management/Professional, 16.3% in Sales and Office Occupations, 15.3% in Service Occupations, 10.6% in Production, Transportation, and Material Moving Occupations, and 1.9% in Construction, Extraction, and Maintenance Occupations. Meanwhile, the income and poverty indicators ratio show that 68% of the people are doing poorly/struggling, with 27.517 per capita income. Relatedly, About 78.4% of the people are renters, while only about 21.6% are living in their own houses. The findings also indicate that the neighborhood's proximity to the university influences its social structure. It shows that most of the residents are working or doing work and study. This shows that the Melrose neighborhood also houses more workers and students. This is backed by the fact that about 70% of them travel for more than 15 minutes to their workplace, no one travels for less than 5 minutes to their workplace, and about 30% walk to work. This shows that the Melrose neighborhood is a dormitory town for most, especially the workers in Iowa City.

Comparative Analysis

The quality of life, socioeconomic indices, and demographic patterns vary significantly between the neighborhoods of Melrose and Creekside. Compared to Melrose, which houses a declining population of 411, Creekside has a much larger and growing population of 1,952 as of 2022, which

probably points to a more desirable residential location. The high share of rentals, 93.2%, and the proximity of Creekside to the university show a student and a working population that keeps the population of the neighborhood young and transient. Evidence is that 19.6% of locals walk to work, and most commute in less than five minutes. Conversely, the population in Melrose has shrunk by 20.5% in the last 14 years, which may indicate an inability to retain locals. The quality of life appears poorer here due to the smaller per capita income and the percentage of residents struggling 68% within the community. Melrose is not driven by the same economic momentum as Creekside, although they are both youthful, active workforce. However, Melrose boosts a more diverse community. Planning interventions need to focus on economic renewal efforts like building affordable housing and job creation. Creekside can guarantee sustainability and inclusivity by keeping costs down while serving its migrant community.

Spatial Development of the neighborhoods

Spatial development is an integral part of community development, as every activity takes place in space. This will portray a better, more visual picture of the situation. Understanding the spatial dimensions of the above-mentioned issues is imperative to the future planning of the neighborhoods. This section, therefore, details the spatial development of the neighborhoods considering Housing, Environment and Transportation.

Creekside and Melrose Neighborhoods Spatial growth

There has not been significant spatial growth in the Creekside neighborhood over the last ten years. The neighborhood was determined by considering the aerial shot of the neighborhood using the Johnson County Property Information Viewer. Shots used for this analysis are those of 2010 and 2021. 2021 because it gives more visual clarity to the analysis since that of 2023 (the latest) was captured in winter; hence, it doesn't portray the greenery as it should. It shows that the neighborhood has been able to maintain its green environment over time, and that is because the area, as of 2010, was already almost entirely built up, hence no significant environmental destruction. The same applies to Melrose. However, Melrose has no greenery than Creekside. Plates 4, 5, 6, and 7 below show this.



4-Creekside, 2010



5-Creekside, 2021



6-Melrose 2010



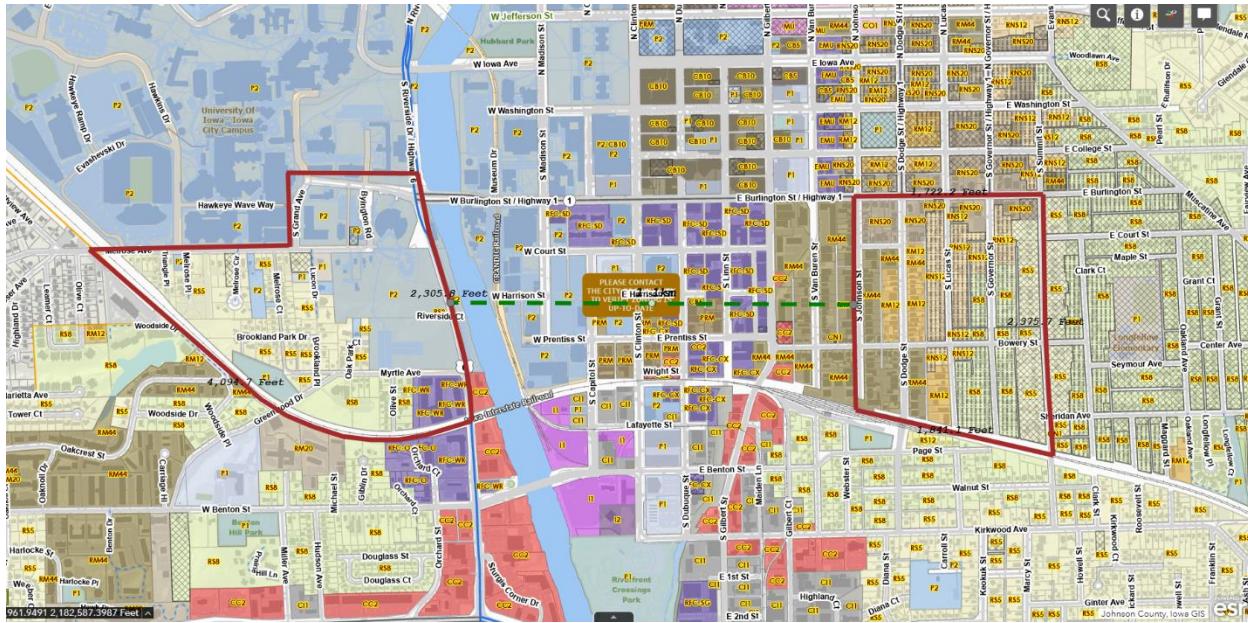
7-Melrose 2021

Source: Johnson County Property Information Viewer, Nov 2024

Creekside and Melrose Neighborhoods Housing structure

Regarding the housing structure, the zoning ordinance is pivotal in analyzing the neighborhoods' quality of life. According to the zoning ordinance published on the Johnson County Property Information Viewer, the Creekside neighborhood is more inclusive with residential land use zones than Melrose. The zones found in Creekside are Neighborhood Stabilization Residential (RS20), High-Density Multi-Family Residential (RM44), High-Density Single-Family Residential (RS12), Low-Density Multi-Family Residential (RM12), Medium Density Single-Family Residential (RS8), and Low-Density Single-Family Residential (RS5). Melrose, on the other hand, comprises Neighborhood Public (P1), Institutional Public (P2), Medium Density Single-Family Residential (RS8), and Low-Density Single-Family Residential (RS5). This shows that Creekside neighborhoods promote diverse housing options, making housing affordable and tracts people (average rent \$818 compared to \$864 in Melrose). See Plate 8.

Plate 8, Zoning Map of the Two neighborhoods



Source: Johnson County Property Information Viewer, Nov 2024

Source: Johnson County Property Information Viewer, Nov 2024

However, even though housing is affordable in Creekside, the Architectural designs are generally modern. The houses there have more front offset than Melrose houses. This makes houses there have their front or backyard gardens. And it typically makes the Creekside neighborhood more appealing. See Plate 9 and 10 below. Invariably, both neighborhoods, according to the city of Iowa City web page, get electricity and gas supply from the MidAmerican Energy Company. Also, the Wastewater, Landfill, and Water divisions of Iowa City serve both neighborhoods regarding sanitary issues.

Plates 9 and 10 Average housing structure in the neighborhoods



An average house in Creekside
Neighborhood



An average house in Melrose
Neighborhood

Source: Author, field visit; 2024

Transportation

Transportation basically means the movement of people and goods from place to place, including the various means through which it is done. Proverbially, it serves as a vein for communities because it links various parts within and outside communities, making it a crucial facet of community development. This section, therefore, assesses the transportation facet of the two neighborhoods.

The Creekside neighborhood road design is generally grid-iron. However, it has two cul-de-sacs in the southern part of the neighborhood: the end tails of Lucas Street and Governor Street. The neighborhood is highly pedestrian-friendly, with sidewalks on both sides of the streets. Again, most parts of the neighborhood are serviced with biking lanes, which supports the convenient movement of people within the neighborhood. A respondent to my short interview noted that movement within the neighborhood is very convenient, but the only issue is that most parts of the neighborhood do not have streetlights, making walking less safe at night. On the other hand, Melrose is not specific as it has intertwined roads in the neighborhood. It has two cul-de-sacs within the central part. Some other roads are also dead-end roads, and some are curved to link other highways, such as Highway 1. Also, all the roads in the neighborhood have one sidewalk, and biking lanes are not included on the access roads. This exposes pedestrians and cyclists to

vehicular pedestrian conflicts. Just like the Creekside, it is also poorly serviced with streetlights. The above analysis shows that Creekside is more convenient for movement than Melrose. See Plates 11 and 12;

Plates 11 and 12 road designs in the two neighborhoods;



Bowery Street in Creekside



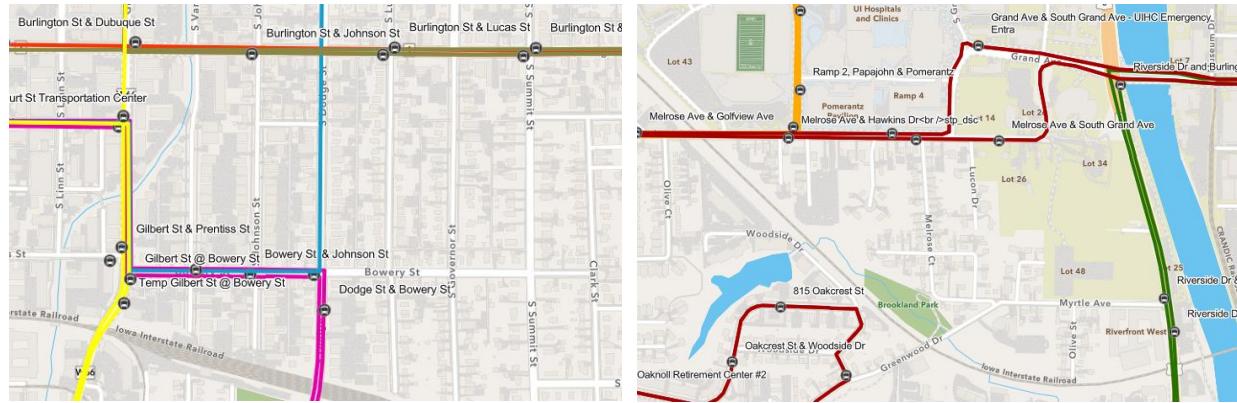
Melrose Circle in Melrose

Source: Author, field visit; 2024

Mode of Transportation

The primary mode of transportation the Creekside neighborhood is Car/Trauck/Van (67%) and about 20% walk while 7% bike. This shows the neighborhood is more motorized, which goes against the current sustainability agenda to reduce carbon emissions by shifting towards mass transit or electric vehicles. More direly, even though the neighborhood is serviced with about 5 public transit buses, only 3.1% use it. This indicates the neighborhood is not environmentally sustainability-sensitive. Likewise, Melrose's shows exhibit the same situation. About 55% of the residents use a Car/Truck/Van, and about 30% walk, 5% bike, and 6% use public transit, although it is serviced by buses. Though it is doing better than Creekside, it is still motorized. The fact that Melrose is a low-income neighborhood may be a key factor in its reliance on non-motorized transit. Plates 13 and 14 show the transit routes in the two neighborhoods. One crucial issue that the transit routes reveal is that public transit is not conveniently accessible because it does not pass through most parts of the neighborhoods.

Plates 13 and 14 Public transit routes

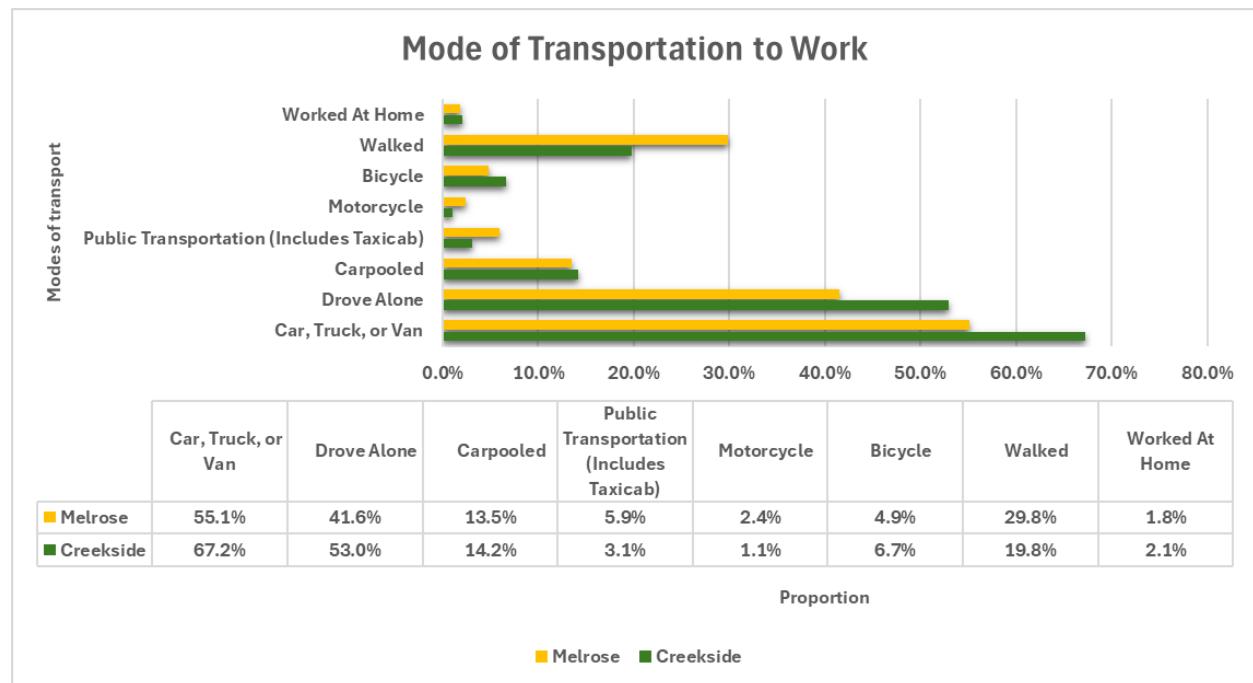


Public transit routes in Creekside

Public transit routes in Melrose

Source: Iowa City Web page, Nov, 2024

Figure 1; Mode of transportation to work



Source: Social Explorer 2022 (5-years estimate)

Safety and Security

Safety and security are indicators of the quality of life in any neighborhood, as they directly affect home values, community cohesion, and the well-being of its citizens. This is crucial for communities, urban planners, and policymakers since they play a crucial role in promoting safety

and security. Focusing on emergency preparedness, pedestrian safety, and crime prevention creates an atmosphere where people can prosper and feel comfortable.

According to Homes.com and WhatisMyCrimeRisk, annually, on a scale of 1-10, the Creekside neighborhood scored 3 for sexual assaults and 3 for robbery. 3 for burglary, 2 for assault with a weapon, and a general crime score of 3. Melrose, on the other hand, scores 5 for sexual assault, 4 for robbery, 3 for assault with a weapon, and a general crime score of 5. This shows that there is a relatively low crime rate in the Creekside neighborhood while that of Melrose is average. However, the crucial issue is that there are more females in Creekside (52.6%) than in Melrose (36.4%); therefore, because sexual assault is rampant in females, it shows that the situation is critical in Melrose since there is high sexual assault even though they have lower female population. It is already well established in the foregone that there is poor street lighting in the two neighborhoods. This further explains why there are such robbery and burglary cases in the two neighborhoods. Moreover, the road design in Melrose does not support safety to some extent. For instance, Plate 16, 17 and 18 show an intersection that could be an accident heaven in the neighborhood and a picture portraying how the two neighborhoods look like at night.

Plate 16, 17 and 18



**Myrtle and Greenwood
intersection in Melrose**



**Myrtle and Greenwood
intersection in Melrose**



**Night scene of the Johnson
Street; Creekside**

Source: Author; field visit; 2024

Recommendations and Conclusion

Having done a comprehensive comparative analysis, it is imperative to give policy recommendations that, when implemented, will remedy the situation for the betterment of the neighborhood's residents. First, Zoning should be expanded to include multi-family and mixed-

use residential zones to encourage diversity and affordability in Melrose. For Creekside Neighborhood, priority should be given to containing population growth and maintaining housing affordability. Enhance services and infrastructure that are much needed for its diverse and migratory population. More investment should be made in the public transit system to extend service routes to the inner roads of the neighborhoods. This will greatly impact ridership and reduce over-reliance on individualistic transit modes, hence setting them on the path of sustainability to ensure a more serene environment. The city should ensure good street lighting at night to improve safety and security in the neighborhood; with this, homeowners may be required to provide street lighting on their immediate front. Myrtle and Greenwood intersection in Melrose must be redesigned and reconstructed to ensure safety along that stretch.

In conclusion, this study identifies some critical prospects and challenges of Melrose and Creekside. Melrose has significant economic disparities; however, both communities need to balance development with housing affordability and accessibility. By implementing the recommended planning interventions, livability, equity, and sustainability will be improved for both communities, yielding places that more comprehensively address the needs of a diverse population.

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