

FIGURE 5.1.5. TOM SYKES RECREATION CENTER (TOP) & LATTA RECREATION CENTER (BOTTOM).



Source: Author, 2013.

5.2. SOCIOECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS OF DILWORTH

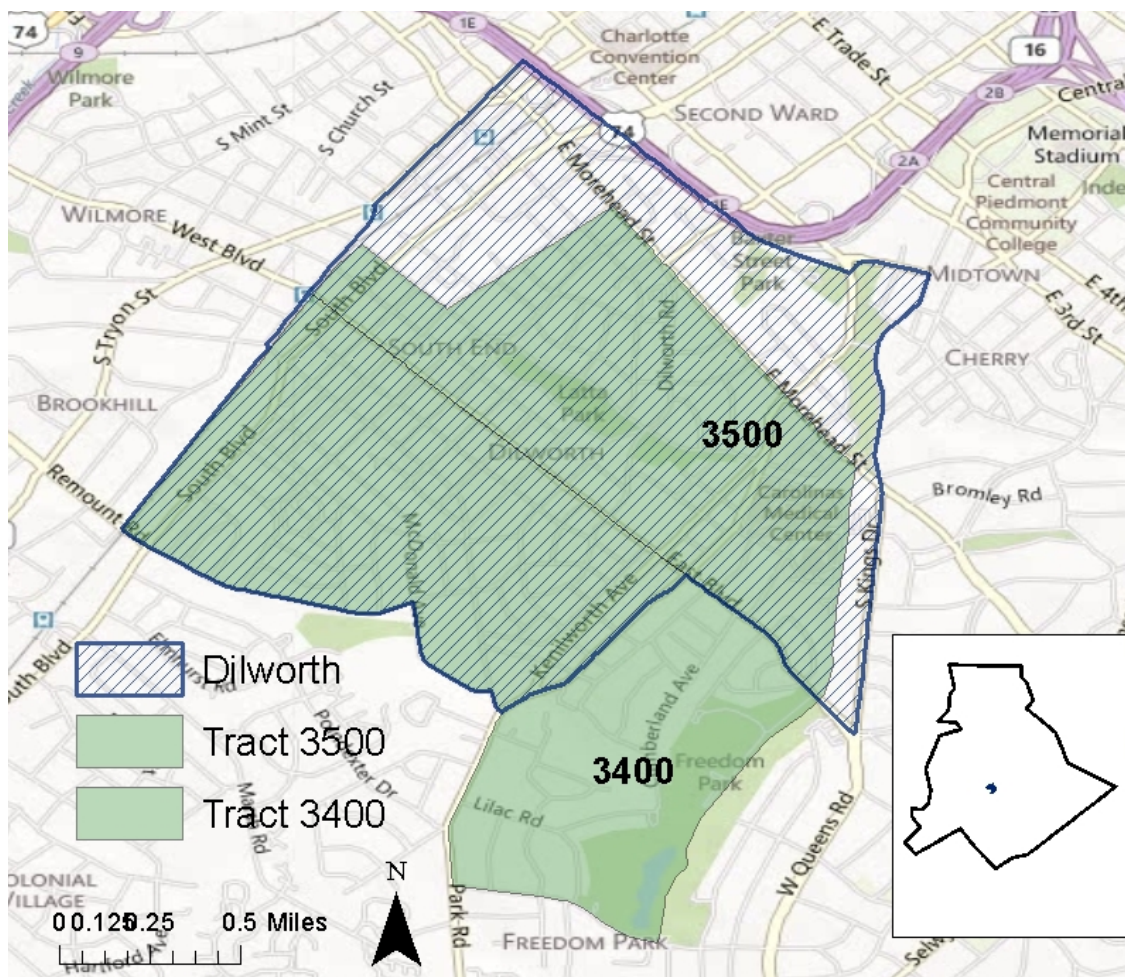
Socioeconomic characteristics were extracted at the census tract level, since Dilworth comprises of two complete tracts. A report by the Planning Commission in 1960 is the beginning piece of data that explains Dilworth's socioeconomic transition. Dilworth was developed for elite and middle class workers, but the neighborhood saw deterioration as white-flight to the suburbs occurred and as the housing stock began to moderately age. However, as 'urban living' caught on in Charlotte, Dilworth began gentrifying as individuals saw the charm of the historic homes and tree-lined streets. The report defines areas by census tracts, so Dilworth is broken into tracts 3400 and 3500, see Figure 5.2.1 for a map. According to the report by the Planning Commission on tract 3400, deterioration occurred as a result of commercial and industrial encroachments into the tract, mainly off of South Boulevard. Dilworth's diversity of residential types ranging from stately mansions and small bungalows were starting to show effects of age. While this report was being written, a massive neighborhood assistance program had begun to improve infrastructure such as curbs, gutters, and sidewalks, as well as low interest loans to help upgrade properties in need. The neighborhood population declined in the 1960's, but the African American population increased, and accounted for a tenth of the total neighborhood's population. The report also goes on to create a ranking for the neighborhood as medium, and the physical quality of medium low. However, the report states that adjacent census tracts on the north, south, and east were all ranked higher and could help stabilize Dilworth, especially if the Neighborhood Assistance Program helps to eliminate some problems ("Neighborhoods in Charlotte" 1976). The report also stated that the mean age of dwelling units was 36.6 years with over 16 percent of units in excess of 60 years in age, and that the neighborhood portion of tract 3400

was under extreme pressures. At that time, the neighborhood could have a bright future depending on the effectiveness of the Neighborhood Assistance Program and for future zoning protection against industrial and commercial encroachment. The report also stated that this section of Dilworth was a valuable asset to the middle income housing stock in the City of Charlotte (“Neighborhoods in Charlotte” 1976).

The report of tract 3500 in Dilworth ranked the tract high in socioeconomic quality based on numbers that indicate the majority of the population being employed in professional and managerial positions. However, the physical quality ranked medium based on zoning effects and relative large number of units over 60 years old. It stated that the zoning effects could be a potential detriment with bordering streets of East Boulevard, South Boulevard and the Sugar Creek area being in the process of office and commercial conversion. The report continued to delineate the issue of aging housing stock in the neighborhood that would continue to be a growing problem (“Neighborhoods in Charlotte” 1976). See Table 5.2.1. for the socioeconomic characteristics outlined in the report by the Planning Commission. Between the period of 1960 and 1970, population change was quite complex in Dilworth because, although it decreased in population, it also had an influx of a different racial group. The total white population decreased by almost 22 percent, while the African American population increased by 822 percent. Tables 5.2.2. – 5.2.5 explains the relationship of the different socioeconomic characteristics between the period of 1970 to 2010 for tracts 3400 and 3500 and Mecklenburg County. Since 1970, Dilworth’s population has decreased, more significantly in 1990, but has once again grown in population, still roughly less than one thousand people than it was 40 years ago. This representation of population decrease and increase can explain the deterioration and white flight to the suburbs. The socioeconomic

characteristics show the experience of gentrification in Dilworth, especially during the period of 1980 to 2000. Median household income significantly increased from roughly \$20,000 to \$65,000. Housing tenure transitioned as well, with more emphasis on owner occupied housing. However a slight transition of more renter occupied housing units has recently surfaced, which may be from the development of more multifamily housing. Total white population follows the trend of population, of decreasing, stabilizing, then increasing. African American population in Dilworth during this time period also shows increase in population, then a gradual decrease.

FIGURE 5.2.1. TRACTS AND NEIGHBORHOOD BOUNDARY, DILWORTH



Source: U.S. Census Bureau; Cartography by: Author

TABLE 5.2.1. 1960 SOCIOECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS IN DILWORTH.

Decade	1960 - 1970
Census Tracts	3400 & 3500
Population	7,762
Total White	7,402
Total Black	244
Median Housing Value	\$16,350
Median Family Income	\$8,861
Families Receiving Public Assistance	54
Percent Population Change, White 1960 – 1970	– 21.7%
Percent Population Change, Black 1960 – 1970	822.75%
Median Rent	\$98

Source: Charlotte Planning Commission, 1976.

TABLE 5.2.2. SOCIOECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS IN DILWORTH.

Geography	Tracts 3400 + 3500				
	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010
Total Population	7,762	6,062	5,580	5,954	6,752
Total White	7,427	5,539	5,208	5,575	6,251
Total Africa American	235	328	288	165	209
Total HHs	2,968	2,891	2,693	2,991	3,332
Median HH Income	N/A	\$14,363	\$37,264	\$63,821	\$65,735
Total HHs with Public Assistance	54	134	77	58	83
Total Housing Units	3,191	2,978	2,825	3,181	3,877
Total Renter Occupied HUs	1,363	1,219	981	1,153	1,922
Total Owner Occupied HUs	1,605	1,617	1,703	1,829	1,410

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

TABLE 5.2.3. PERCENT CHANGE BETWEEN DECADES

Geography	Tracts 3400 + 3500			
Year	% Change 1970 – 1980	% Change 1980 - 1990	% Change 1990 – 2000	% Change 2000 – 2010
Total Population	-21.9%	-8.0%	6.7%	13.4%
Total White	-25.4%	-6.0%	7.0%	12.1%
Total African American	39.6%	-12.2%	-42.7%	26.7%
Total HHs	-2.6%	-6.8%	11.1%	11.4%
Median Household Income	N/A	159.4%	71.3%	3.0%
Total HHs with Public Assistance	148.1%	-42.5%	-24.7%	43.1%
Total HUs	-6.7%	-5.1%	12.6%	21.9%
Total Renter Occupied HUs	-10.6%	-19.5%	17.5%	66.7%
Total Owner Occupied HUs	0.7%	5.3%	7.4%	-22.9%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

TABLE 5.2.4 MECKLENBURG COUNTY SOCIOECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

Geography	Mecklenburg County				
Year	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010
Total Population	354,656	404,232	411,433	695,454	919,628
Total White	269,283	291,856	364,484	450,090	508,946
Total Africa American	83,978	107,222	134,616	197,102	282,404
Total Households	91,089	147,730	200,125	273,561	398,510
Total HHs with Public Assistance	3,247	9,829	9,225	13,029	20,508
Median Household Income	N/A	\$17,837	\$36,823	\$74,106	\$54,401
Total Housing Units	114,736	155,750	216,416	292,780	398,510
Total Renter Occupied HUs	43,090	58,312	80,656	103,024	142,625
Total Owner Occupied HUs	66,442	90,634	119,563	170,392	219,588

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

TABLE 5.2.5 TRENDS BETWEEN DECADES

Geography	Mecklenburg County			
Year	% Change 1970 – 1980	% Change 1980 - 1990	% Change 1990 – 2000	% Change 2000 – 2010
Total Population	13.9%	26.5%	36.0%	32.2%
Total White	8.3%	24.9%	23.5%	13.1%
Total African American	22.7%	25.5%	46.4%	43.3%
Total Households	62.2%	35.5%	35.7%	45.7%
Total HHs with Public Assistance	N/A	-6.1%	41.2%	57.4%
Median Household Income	202.7%	117.1%	101.2%	-26.6%
Total Housing Units	35.7%	39.0%	35.3%	36.1%
Total Renter Occupied HUs	35.3%	38.3%	27.7%	38.4%
Total Owner Occupied HUs	36.4%	31.9%	45.2%	28.9%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

5.3. PUBLIC EXPENDITURES IN DILWORTH

The merger of the Mecklenburg County’s and City of Charlotte’s Parks and Recreation departments has dictated the time period that the public expenditures were analyzed. Also, the line item expenses that were available from the new merged department has also dictated the expenses in both Dilworth and Reid Park. Dilworth has two recreation centers, Latta Recreation Center and Tom Sykes Recreation Center. Expenses for Tom Sykes Recreation Center for fiscal years 2005 through 2008 was obtained through Mecklenburg County. For the three year time period, a total of \$1,498,320.71 of public money was allocated towards the Tom Sykes Recreation Center. The expenses were allocated for landscaping, facility upgrades, architecture services, security systems, equipment, furniture, and other renovations to the facility.

Expenses for Latta Recreation Center were accrued for fiscal years 1998 through 2001, and for fiscal year 2007. A total of \$335,634.40 was spent for those four fiscal years. Expenses were allocated for roofing repairs, architect services, construction, and landscaping. The only fiscal years that were retrieved from Mecklenburg County for Latta Park accounted for fiscal years 2011 and 2012. A total of \$54,878.34 was spent during those two years, however, anecdotal observation shows that more money has obviously been spent on improvements to Latta Park. The park has a newer playground, sprayground (\$160,000 not accounted for in calculation), multiple pedestrian bridges recently installed, and decorative lighting. Although it appears that other expenditures on items in Latta Park, Latta Recreation Center, and Tom Sykes Recreation Center were not passed over from Mecklenburg County Parks and Recreation for this research, it seems that the expenditures are not available because more money may have been invested. All expenditures and the total 2010 population of Dilworth averages out to \$279.70 per person for recreational expenses.

5.4. CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN DILWORTH

One reason Dilworth was able to reverse the decay that once threatened to destroy it was the leadership of civic-minded residents who, at a time when the city's momentum was to the suburbs, recognized the advantages of an inner-city location, and were smart and tireless in taking advantage of the city's increasingly sophisticated planning processes and its growing interest in historic preservation (Shinn 1995). That neighborhood civic-minded self-interest remains strong. One indication was the turnout for the mayoral candidates' forum in 1995. In the middle of the recreational activities of the annual neighborhood jubilee, dozens of Dilworth residents sat attentively for about 45 minutes in the oppressive heat while candidates for mayor answered questions. They listened carefully, applauded politely when a

candidate said something they liked, and were politely silent when a candidate said something they didn't particularly like. They obviously were interested in hearing what the candidates had to say not only about matters of particular interest to the neighborhood, but also about larger issues such as park security, consolidation and transit. That attentiveness to the political process makes elected officials, in turn, responsive to the neighborhood and its concerns (Shinn 1995). Another reason for Dilworth's resilience, I think, is that it is a true, old-fashioned neighborhood. It's compact and densely developed, with a large park, a grid system of streets instead of cul-de-sacs, a convenient and stimulating mix of commercial, institutional and residential uses, and a wide enough range of housing options that has attracted a socioeconomically diverse population. It's an attractive, functional model of urban neighborhood development, the kind that's conducive to efficient delivery of municipal services (Shinn 1995).

During Dilworth's transition, organization around issues of zoning in the neighborhood to protect the fringes and build a strong barrier to sustain the neighborhood, was an impetus for the development of the Dilworth Community Development Association (Haag 1985). Combating suburban sprawl, daily commuter traffic congestion from downtown, and bottlenecks of new developments was the impetus for Dilworth residents to begin analyzing the external effects around their neighborhood (Curry 1986). Neighborhoods took action to model after Dilworth's hotbed of home restoration activity. By the 1960s, people rediscovered these areas as a place to buy solid houses that lent themselves to restoration (Low 1987). The Dilworth Community Development Association formed to combat issues regarding deterioration, blight, and land use issues that were detrimental to the neighborhood. Dilworth Community Development Association's first

major victories were against Duke Power Company. Duke Power wanted to run high voltage power lines through the neighborhood, but Dilworth residents protested the high tension power lines by shouting “stop the line” and picketing Duke Power Company (Perlmutter 1987). The peaceful resistance and neighborhood spirit that developed brought Duke Power Company to not develop the lines in the neighborhood (Perlmutter 1988). Dilworth’s success against Duke Power Company was then sent to the Council level which brought City Council to adopt a formal position against high-tension lines going through any other residential areas (Gubbins 1988).

Dilworth residents and the Dilworth Community Development Association continued to raise their voices in regards to issues that affected the neighborhood. The Dilworth Community Development Association petitioned a request to the Charlotte City Council to consider group homes to have a buffer to shield private homes and to space them in a way that they are clustered throughout the city. The combatting issue in Dilworth in the early 1990s built the impendance to take action at the city council level (Brown 1992). Dilworth residents and the Community Development Association fought and had success against the incorporation of group homes and halfway houses in the neighborhood to keep areas around day-care centers and elderly housing complexes safe (McClain 1995). Alongside fighting high tension power lines, group homes and halfway houses, the Dilworth Community Development Association fought businesses that resided on the fringe of the neighborhood due to poor zoning codes that were developed as the city embraced suburbanization in earlier decades. The Dilworth Community Development Association was able to ward off an adult video store that put emphasis on the City closing loopholes such as this (Whitacre 1995).

As Dilworth saw periods of transition and restoration, the public picked up on the new stereotype that began dwelling in the neighborhood as it became safer, and socially acceptable as gentrification progressed. As radical hippies moved in to take on urban living and fix up old homes, the process transitioned into different waves of gentrification. By 1995, the City of Charlotte stigmatized the stereotype of Dilworth residents as bank-working, BMW-driving, brie-nibbling, elitist-leaning snobs (Enna 1995). Although that is not true of all residents, it does indicate that Dilworth definitely experienced the total waves of gentrification. The early 2000s brought a mix of developers developing mixed-use developments through trial and error. Dilworth became a hot bed for the new development concept in Charlotte, and started a density dispute that caught many eyes of concerned Dilworth residents. At times, residents opposed and approved projects based on the developments being too large for their-near uptown neighborhood (Rubin 2003). The increased proposals of high density residential complexes and mixed-use developments increased rage in Dilworth because many of the new developments called for rezoning's and the demolition of blocks of homes in the neighborhood to build such complexes. The increasing traffic from new developments caused concern since the ever-declining corridor of South Boulevard was sought as a place for the new developments rather than the neighborhood. The zoning was being applied to construct smart growth planned developments which Dilworth residents liked, but the scale was an issue to its surroundings. Density in Dilworth in the early 2000s was being approved at upwards of 88 units an acre in the zoning , which became overwhelming for residents. Dilworth approved of density, but density by design, not density by happenstance (Walker 2003). Charlotte's embrace of smart

growth and urban density in the early 2000s, within Dilworth, was almost assumed to be as Charlotte's test area for new types of dense development (Walker 2003).

As Dilworth organized around rezoning's and developments impacting their neighborhood, they also organized around improving the infrastructure in the neighborhood. Dilworth has been walkable and well connected since the neighborhood received various investments in the 1960s and 1970s as the City's Neighborhood Reinvestment Program built sidewalks, curbs, and gutters in the neighborhood. In the early 2000s, Dilworth was referenced as Charlotte's most walkable neighborhood, with great access and connectivity to shops and restaurants. However, although there was ample infrastructure, it was not good enough in regards to connectivity and safety (Newsom 2003). Since then, multiple investments in regards to connectivity and accessibility have been made in Dilworth. Investments such as road dieting, street calming, and other aesthetic street calming investments have been made. As Dilworth collaborated with City Council on new mixed-use and high-density developments, the neighborhood had a new task of protection against development on South Boulevard on the city's new light-rail line. The City of Charlotte, as it should, has promoting transit-focused growth near its light rail system. It created a special TOD (i.e. "transit-oriented development") zoning which allows high-density, high-rise mixed-use projects. The problem is that the light-rail line abuts Dilworth's boundary. In the past, the city hasn't adequately protected one of its most lovely, economically vibrant historic neighborhoods, which calls for more civic engagement and activism (Newsom 2007). As the development of the light-rail abuts Dilworth, more and more people are interested in the neighborhood and want to reside in the neighborhood.

A lot of Dilworth's properties in the last decades, were torn down and built into McMansion's to suit the capabilities and needs of modern families. However, a strong emphasis has been placed in Dilworth to protect historic properties, with the implementation of covenants on certain streets and houses in portions of Dilworth that do not allow for changes to the elevations of the homes. Historic districts and historic preservation has played a key role in Dilworth for protection and conservation of the historical identity, but new emphasis on placing restrictions on individual deeds of properties is a new emphasis in Dilworth for protection of its historic sections of the neighborhood (Sullivan 2009).

Alongside restoration, sustaining the aesthetics of Latta Park has been a long time goal of the neighborhood. Latta Park has been publicly embellished as one of the City's nicest parks. Residents identify their love and interest for living so close to Latta Park by referencing it as their own forest primeval, making it feel like they live on the brink of the wilderness but being only a mile from downtown (Powell 1994). Latta Park is even marketed as a place in Charlotte that is perfect for a Sunday stroll, with no need for a distant escape to be in nature ("Park Pleasures" 1994).

After the merger of the City and County Parks and Recreation departments, Dilworth residents took action to make Latta Park even better. Crews from the city Parks and Recreation Department worked in Latta Park for several months after the merger to reduce erosion, improve landscaping and make the park easier to maintain. The work included straightening and channelizing the creek in some places, installing riprap (large chunks of broken rock to reduce erosion) at the park's lower end, building berms to direct hillside runoff to drains, replacing lost soil and planting grass to reduce erosion on the park's steep slopes (Haag 1995). Since revitalizing natural features of the park, the neighborhood took

part in a number of aesthetic improvements to the park. Due to increased interest in their neighborhood, Dilworth residents' action seems to take the eye of the City and County. The County rolled out the first three "spraygrounds" in 2002, with one of them being in Latta Park. One sprayground alone is an expense of \$160,000 (Crouch 2002). The role that Dilworth's residents and stakeholders play has definitely been invaluable to Dilworth's revitalization.

Dilworth's complex history, housing stock, and civic participation has illustrated that gentrification played a key role in the stability and quality of life in the neighborhood, today. The merger of the City and County Parks and Recreation departments in 1992 seemed to have little impact on Latta Park and adjoining recreation centers in Dilworth, since the facilities were in fair condition, although it was a city park before the merger. Dilworth being Charlotte's first streetcar suburb and anecdotally, Charlotte's first gentrified inner-city neighborhood, precludes that the City of Charlotte has had its "eyes" on Dilworth, ensuring that it sustains and strengthened during its decades of deterioration and transition. Although monetary data is not sufficient enough to display that the City/County invested more in Dilworth's recreational facilities, anecdotal observation identifies that these facilities have been well maintained, preserved, and invested in.

CHAPTER 6. HISTORY OF REID PARK

Very different from the experience and quality of life of Dilworth, is the Reid Park neighborhood, a mere two miles away from Dilworth, and roughly two-and-a-half miles from Uptown. Reid Park's history differs drastically from Dilworth. Ross Reid, an African American who owned the tract of land that the neighborhood now rests, established Reid Park in 1935, making Reid Park significantly younger than Dilworth. By 1937, Ross Reid

starting granting land to new landowners. He then sold the land to a real estate company in the 1940s that was eager on getting the land sold and developed (Pryer et Al 2010). By the late 1940s, Reid Park was considered an exclusive neighborhood for African American families, due to a condition that Reid placed on the land, stating that land would only be sold to African Americans (Wright 1995). The neighborhood was not a planned neighborhood like Dilworth, it formed organically, with families purchasing their land and building their homes by scratch. However, some of the first homes were military barracks that were moved from the nearby Camp Greene military training facility that closed after World War II. Reid Park was annexed into the Charlotte jurisdiction, and development gradually picked up in the neighborhood shortly after the annexation, possibly due to additional city services being offered. The neighborhood saw more infill development into the 1970s, however, approximately three-quarters of the neighborhood remained undeveloped. Historically, Reid Park and Dilworth developed very differently, and this hints at the experiences of the two neighborhoods today (Pryer et Al 2010). Although experiences in Reid Park proved differently, quality of life was high throughout the first forty years of the neighborhoods establishment, as indicated by a long time Reid Park resident:

“Reid Park was a village, and a true concept of a village that displayed social capital and was a solid community with all residents invested in the community. During this time, there was recreational activity within the neighborhood before Amay James Park and Recreation Center were established. The recreational activity consisted of a small playground that consisted of wooden equipment such as seesaws, swings, and a merry-go-round.”

By the mid-1980s, Reid Park started to see a period of decline as quality of life shrunk, crime reddened the streets, and the neighborhood park became abandoned. Once decline of the neighborhood began, Reid Park advocates saw the community as an asset, and from there, the Reid Park Neighborhood Association formed in 1985. Reid Park residents

organized around crime and deterioration in the first four years of the neighborhood association's initial formation. Four years after the neighborhood association established, residents further organized with outside partners to form a community development corporation (CDC). In 1989, Reid Park Associates was formed with board members composed of half neighborhood residents and half skilled professionals to contribute to the CDC. The intent of Reid Park Associates was to preserve and enhance the character of the Reid Park, combat community deterioration, juvenile delinquency and crime, provide relief to the poor, distressed, underprivileged and aged; seek to eliminate prejudice and discrimination, thereby lessening the burdens of the government (Reid Park History 2010). One of the main advocates for Reid Park Associates was and still is, is Rickey Hall, who grew up in Reid Park. Hall first began organizing the community in 1985 by helping to establish the neighborhood association. Hall's organizing began when he still lived in the neighboring Westover Hills neighborhood, before moving back and then establishing Reid Park Associates in 1989 ("A tireless community champion" 1995). Hall's impendance for organization began when he noticed Dilworth beginning to take shape in the 1980s, while at the same time, communities like Reid Park were experiencing a lack of amenities, substandard housing, and were in need of infrastructure improvements (Reid Park History 2010). Hall believed that planning efforts that took place in other parts of the city could be brought to Reid Park, and felt that the amount of vacant land was a strong development point for the neighborhood. He wanted to use these assets to attract additional growth to the West Boulevard corridor "while at the same time providing a higher quality of life (Hall 2010). Conversation with a long time resident of Reid Park contributes to Reid Park's experience and development of their CDC:

“Reid Park’s existence as a village was the foundation for change and beginning developments of the neighborhood association and Reid Park Associates.”

Reid Park Associates was fantastic in receiving grants and donations to remodel existing homes and build a total of eight homes in the 1990s. Reid Park Associates was also determined to increase connectivity in the neighborhood and make it function better. During the early stages of the CDC, land was donated as a gift from a Charlotte businessman, Joe Withrow (Hall 2010). Within the land donated, was a large parcel of land in the spine of the neighborhood that was coined to be a future park. Since the initial period of decline in Reid Park, that organized the CDC, Amay James Park, Reid Park’s neighborhood park, became abandoned.

Reid Park Associates proposed a land swap to the city to swap two pieces of land. The deal was for the abandoned park, owned by the County, to be swapped for the large parcel of land in the spine of the neighborhood, which was owned by Reid Park Associates. Plans for a new neighborhood park in the center of the neighborhood was to promote connectivity, including trails, picnic areas, and potentially a playground. Many residents felt the current park was undesirable because it was in a heavily wooded and poorly lit part of the neighborhood (Ly 1997). The parcel of land was described as a ravine running through the center of the neighborhood and residents felt that the vacant lot divided the neighborhood in half. The plan for the land swap was to have the County take over the parcel in the spine of the neighborhood and develop that into an internal park, and for Reid Park Associates to develop the existing park property into an extension of the neighborhood, building forty-six new homes (Hall 2010). However, in the early 2000s, administrative and monetary issues led Reid Park Associates to go bankrupt. In order for Reid Park Associates to pay back their

debts after their bankruptcy, they had to give up their only assets – land. The city stepped in and took care of their debts, by taking over Reid Park Associates’ only assets.

After a decade of hard work in Reid Park by residents and Reid Park Associates, the CDC ended up bankrupt. During the period of transition, the neighborhood was considered stable by the City of Charlotte. However, a decade after the collapse of the CDC, Reid Park is again categorized as challenged by the Charlotte Quality of Life Study. The neighborhood park has been abandoned for some time and the open spaces in Reid Park have become a dumping ground for shady contractors from across the city. In 2010, Amay James Recreation Center was closed due to drastic budget cuts across Mecklenburg County departments. Amay James Park has been abandoned for decades, according to residents of Reid Park. Reid Park and Dilworth developed differently, for two different racial groups but both for working class households, with the exception of the few homes for the elitist in Dilworth. Although, both neighborhoods were developed for working class families, current physical observation seems as if distribution of investments have not been equitable.

6.1. GREEN AND RECREATIONAL SPACE

Referencing a Mecklenburg County Parks and Recreation Map of facilities will indicate a park space and recreation center in Reid Park. In reality, both a neighborhood park and recreation center are physically in place, but the park is completely abandoned and the recreation center has been closed since 2010 due to drastic budget cuts (Mecklenburg County Parks and Recreation). Amay James Recreation Center was one of four centers that was closed in 2010, and interestingly, the other three centers that were closed were in historically African American neighborhoods. However, recent interest in the Recreation Center has picked up. The recreation center is in the process of being leased to Charlotte Mecklenburg

School System. Neighboring Reid Park Academy was recently converted from a K-5 to K-8 school. The school was not built for middle school aged children, so the recreation center will house the recreational activities for the sixth, seventh, and eighth graders. Anecdotally, residents of Reid Park indicated that they feel disadvantaged because they have no facilities that are operable. When they heard the Amay James Recreation Center was reopening, there was excitement, however, the neighborhood wasn't completely invited into the space until the neighborhood organized around the issue.

The Amay James Neighborhood Park is a different story from Latta Park. Amay James Park opened alongside Amay James Recreation Center in 1977. However, development of the park was minimal, and it was never developed to its fullest capability (Hall 2013). Amay James Park only had natural fitness trails that people walked and ran on – these trails were simply compacted dirt, no gravel or mulch. The trails led to the back end of the park, to wooden fitness equipment and canopy picnic area with grills that turned into a haven for bad behavior due to its isolation from the neighborhood (Hall 2013). A Reid Park resident explains the park's abandonment due to its isolation:

“Decline was visible in the park by 2000. All services were pulled out of the recreation center and park in 2008. The park and fitness trail were never really maintained to the effect that they should've been, and walking through its 31 acres that was initially developed in 1977 shows that its been abandoned for that amount of time.”

The Reid Park resident also indicated that Amay James Recreation Center, built alongside Amay James Park, served residents inside and outside of Reid Park during its prime.

“The gym and annex housed a variety of programs and services and was a hub for recreational activity. Once neighboring Southwest Recreation Center, was built, activity decreased, and once Revolution and Arbor Glen Recreation Centers were built, activity stalled greatly. A variety of service providers were always at the recreation center to provide assistance and services, and the service providers met regularly to provide the

services. Residents relied on the amenities at Amay James Recreation Center. Once all services pulled out of the Amay James Center and with the closing of the center, residents of Reid Park took a direct toll at lacking accessibility to social necessities.”

The entrance to the park is tucked away in a rear corner of the neighborhood with only two homes nearby. Both homes have recently been torn down by Code Enforcement. The once parking lot, is completely overgrown with grass, and has a foot layer of degrading pin oak leaves. There is also illegal dumping of furniture and tires throughout the parking lot and park space. The park also was planned to be the gateway to the Irwin Creek Greenway, however, the portion of the greenway that was to connect Reid Park to surrounding neighborhoods and business park off Tyvola Road has been delayed and constantly pushed down the list of the County’s Capital Improvement Plans. See table 6.1. for the amenities of Amay James Park, and Figure 6.1.1 for the spatial relationship of the park and recreation center to the rest of the neighborhood. Figure 6.1.2 captures the parks abandonment, and figure 6.1.3. captures the conditions in the “planned park” space. Figures 6.1.4. and 6.1.5. show the recent revitalization of Amay James Recreation Center, three years after its closing.

The land swap between Mecklenburg County and Reid Park Associates was transacted, however, due to Reid Parks Associates’ bankruptcy, resulted in no development. Mecklenburg County’s property ownership website, Virtual Charlotte, shows that the parcel for the planned park is labeled as ‘Reid Community Park’ (Virtual Charlotte 2013). However, referencing a map and then physically observing the space results very differently. The planned park resembles the state of the current park. Illegal dumping is a huge issue in this area, since it is densely wooded. Reid Park Associates’ land swap was transacted because the CDC believed the parcel of land was visioned to be like Latta Park in Dilworth. Speaking to former Parks and Recreation park planners indicated that the ‘ravine’ that the

planned park would be housed, would end up costing the County a lot of money just to get the land at a better grade to create a ‘Latta Park’ (DeKemper 2013), which led to the anecdotal assumption to why the park has yet to be constructed. A Reid Park resident explained why they compared Reid Park’s planned park to Latta Park:

“I made a comparison between Reid Park's planned park and Latta Park from more than 29 years ago when I served on the Planning Commission and 2005 Central District Planning Committee with the likes of people such as Tony Pressley (Southend Visionary) and Malen Adams (deceased Park Road/Freedom Park advocate/subsequent Planning Commission Board member), and Planning Commission staffers such Stanley Watkins, Debra Campbell, and Nikita Wright. When discussions and or tours were conducted in Malen's or Tony's respective area of interest, I observed how passionate and committed they were in terms of getting their visions incorporated into the 2005 plan. Today we see the fruits of their labor in both sectors of the aforementioned communities that they represented. Following their lead, during one of the discussions and subsequent tours of the West Boulevard Corridor and Reid Park Community, I made the analogy about how the topography of Latta Park is much like the topography of the proposed park land in Reid Park. From that time on, both the vision and the quest to see it come to fruition remains. These things occurred during the time when Dilworth was in transition.”

TABLE 6.1. INVENTORY OF PARK/RECREATION CENTER AMENITIES

Reid Park Windshield Survey	
Acres	31
Recreation Centers	Amay James (closed)
Playground	No
Trails	Natural (abandoned)
Athletic Fields/Courts	Basketball
Other Infrastructure	Benches, picnic tables
Landscaping	Unmaintained, decaying leaves/illegal dumping
Usage	n/a

Source: Author, Mecklenburg County

FIGURE 6.1.1. GREEN SPACE/RECREATION SPACE IN REID PARK.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, City of Charlotte.

FIGURE 6.1.2. AMAY JAMES PARK.



Source: Author, 2012.

FIGURE 6.1.3. PLANNED NEIGHBORHOOD PARK.



Source: Author, 2012.