

Equity Profile: Lexington, KY

Lexington-Fayette Urban County Government, Office of Diversity and Inclusion

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Foreword

When we received our summer assignment to Lexington, our initial thoughts landed somewhere in the Venn diagram of horses, bourbon, and basketball. As we explored the city, however, we found anything but a monolith. The defining privilege of our time in Lexington has been engaging with the city's vibrant and resilient community. Lexington residents received our questions with nuance and grace, eager to share their experiences with the city. As we worked to create an equity profile, we had to think openly yet analytically about the feedback given to us by community members. Traveling across the city, we listened to many Lexington tales. Initially, our visits from coffee shops to historical Black hamlets to horse farms were dizzying; across the myriad of different perspectives we heard, we struggled to understand how we could reconcile these different Lexingtons into one report.

However, our vision began to focus once we visited The Oasis, an affordable housing development on the Northside. The Oasis was the site of a news conference and progress report for the Mobile Market, a government initiative to bring fresh groceries to food deserts around Lexington. We felt welcomed as residents and council members greeted us warmly, offering cake and ice cream. The following week, we interviewed two residents of the Oasis, Wilbur and Doris. One question that we asked all stakeholders was, "If you could wave a magic wand and implement a change in Lexington, what would it be?" Among many issues, Mr. Richey and Doris spoke of the desire to expand public transportation to the Oasis. "I don't understand why they don't come down here," she said.

I don't understand why they don't come down here. As we continued our work for the rest of the week, this thought remained persistently at the forefront of our work. Equity is not an email blast or a highground; the cornerstone of equity work is meeting people where they are—going out of your way to give someone an opportunity. In other words, developing the compassion, empathy, and skillset to "come down here" to meet community members where they are at and give them the tools to thrive. We met with Wilbur and Doris to discuss food deserts, but our conversations community members have demonstrated a variety of "deserts" within the city. Education deserts. Dialogue deserts.

Opportunity deserts. The goal of our recommendations is to provide a roadmap for steps that the Department of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion can take to meet citizens where they are instead of where they should be. We hope that this report will guide the conversation towards change in Lexington.

Purpose and Methodology

The purpose of this project is to conduct an equity profile for the city of Lexington. Funded by the Morehead-Cain Foundation at UNC-Chapel Hill, this profile is the capstone project of our internship with the Lexington-Fayette Urban County Government under the supervision of Ms. Tiffany Michelle Brown, Chief Equity and Implementation Officer. Throughout our work with Ms. Brown, we have developed several lenses through which one can understand equity. As five college students, we have observed that the term “equity” can be politically polarizing within the current political climate, even at our university. Ultimately, however, the values surrounding equity and equity implementation strategies are values that we believe are shared by most Americans. Equity is a tool for justice; instead of allocating the same resources to all individuals, equity measures consider individual circumstances and identity to give everyone the same opportunities.

To assess prominent structural issues regarding equity in Lexington, we conducted qualitative interviews with local stakeholders (see page 6). Interview structure was guided by the study *Open-Ended Interview Questions and Saturation*, published by the National Institute of Health. Notes from each interview were recorded and analyzed for salient themes regarding equity. Themes were cross-referenced to determine the most actionable items for change. Although the majority of data is qualitative, quantitative data from relevant studies, community assessments, and national trends has also been employed. Our findings and recommendations fall under the five categories outlined by the Mayor’s Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion taskforce: Health Equity; Education; Racial Equity; Housing and Gentrification; and Police, Law and Justice. Within each subtopic, we outline areas for growth, initiatives that have already been completed, and recommendations for future policy implementation within the city.

Interview Participants

James Brown, Councilmember At-Large

Tracy Bruno, Lexington-Fayette County Public Schools Superintendent Chief of Staff

Devine Carama, Director of One Lexington at LFUCG, Musical Artist

Shaun Denney, Senior Administrative Officer at Lexington-Fayette Urban County Government

Emily Drury, IDEA (Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility) Consultant

Lisa Ellis, Lexington Mobile Market Manager

Kalvin Graves, Historian

Mandy Higgins, Lexington History Museum Executive Director

Seneca Hudson, Entrepreneur and Co-Owner of the Creole Café

Phil Jun, Public Relations and Communications Strategist

Sharon Lynch, Councilmember (District 2)

Abdul Muhammad, WesBanco Market President Central Kentucky

Kathy Plomin, Councilmember (District 12)

Wilbur Richey and Doris, Community Members

Jessica Sass, Executive Director of Population Health at UK Healthcare, Nurse Practitioner

Eli Scarr, Documentary Filmmaker

Boyd Sewe, Senior Executive Planner

Tukea Talbert, Chief Diversity Officer at UK Healthcare

Marvin Young, Director of Kentucky Freedmen Coalition

Nathan Zamarron, LexArts Community Arts Director

The Lexington Police Department

Healthcare

I. Area for Growth: Assessment of Racial Health Disparities

Observations: Limited data exists surveying racial health disparities within Lexington-Fayette County. Data collection is a crucial step in identifying and mitigating health disparities. Developing methods of holistically quantifying areas of healthcare need will significantly increase the efficacy and productivity of health equity measures.¹

Existing Initiatives: Community needs assessments were conducted by Saint Joseph's Hospital (2022)² and Baptist Health Hospital (2024).³ These community health needs assessments have been pivotal in understanding health inequities within sectors of Lexington's healthcare system. These assessments, however, cannot be used as a foundation for health equity work within the city because each assessment is limited to the patient population. Moreover, these assessments do not include demographic factors such as gender and LGBTQ+ status, and do not track social determinants of health, community perception of healthcare disparities, and systematic identification of root causes. In addition, we understand that the healthcare subcommittee of the Mayor's Commission for Racial Equity (2020) is working to devise ways to survey the community's needs.⁴

Recommendations: We recommend that Lexington conduct a Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA), modeled after the Louisville Metro Community Health Assessment (2018).⁵

¹ Linda T. Bilheimer and Richard J. Klein, "Data and Measurement Issues in the Analysis of Health Disparities," *Health Services Research* 45, no. 5p2 (August 2, 2010): 1489–1507, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6773.2010.01143.x>.

² "Community Health Needs Assessment," CHI Saint Joseph Health, 2022, [file:///Users/maebrockman/Downloads/saint-joseph-hospital-chna2020-22%20\(1\).pdf](file:///Users/maebrockman/Downloads/saint-joseph-hospital-chna2020-22%20(1).pdf).

³ "2022-2024 Community Health Needs Assessment," Baptist Health, 2024, <https://www.chisaintjosephhealth.org/library/default-tab-bar-back/about-us/healthy-communities/2020-2022-community-health-needs-assessment>.

⁴ Roszalyn Akins and Gerald Smith, "Mayor's Commission for Racial Justice and Equity," Lexington Kentucky Government, October 3, 2020, <https://www.lexingtonky.gov/sites/default/files/2020-10/Racial%20Justice%20Equality%20Report%20FINAL%5B1%5D.pdf>.

⁵ "Louisville Metro Community Health Assessment" (Department of Public Health and Wellness, September 2018), <https://louisvilleky.gov/health-wellness/document/2018communityhealthneedsassessmentdetailedfindingspdf>.

CHNAs are a method used to identify community health needs and resources within a local area. The project, which employed multiple stakeholders, was largely driven by the Louisville Metro Department of Public Health and Wellness. The Louisville Metro Community Health Assessment analyzed Louisville’s community health through the lens of health status, perceived community strengths, underlying forces of change, and public health systems.⁶ The study also employed a mixed-methods approach to obtain quantitative and qualitative data surveying broader Louisville. Crucially, the survey identified root causes including environment, school systems, and access to fresh food regarding the observed health disparities. Data were stratified demographically based on race, ethnicity, gender identity, and LGBTQ+ status.⁷ Conducting a CHNA study within Lexington is an imperative step. Because the University of Kentucky is a prominent healthcare stakeholder, we envision UK Health as the driving force of Lexington’s future CHNA.

II. Area for Growth: Food Security

Observations: Across the United States, food insecurity disproportionately impacts low-income families and families of color.⁸ This disparity is reflected throughout Northern Lexington, where food deserts intensify existing nutritional insecurities. Previous studies have demonstrated that access to nutritious food is a pivotal social determinant of health. Children who grow up in food deserts are at a higher risk for obesity, early hypertension, high blood pressure, Type 2 diabetes, and heart disease.⁹ Lack of accessible, healthy food options throughout Northern Lexington exacerbates existing racial health disparities by placing marginalized communities at a disadvantage.

Existing Initiatives: In 2023, Lexington launched the mobile market, a “rolling food oasis” designed to address insufficient nutrition within the city.¹⁰ The market carries fresh produce and

⁶ “Louisville Metro Community Health Assessment” (Department of Public Health and Wellness, September 2018), <https://louisvilleky.gov/health-wellness/document/2018communityhealthneedsassessmentdetailedfindingspdf>.

⁷ “Louisville Metro Community Health Assessment.”

⁸ National Research Council (US). *The Public Health Effects of Food Deserts: Workshop Summary*. PubMed. Washington (DC): National Academies Press (US), 2009. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK208019/>.

⁹ National Research Council (US), *The Public Health Effects*.

¹⁰ LEX TV, “Mobile Market Press Conference,” YouTube, June 12, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ggkrzuopmU>.

household staples at sixty stops across the city, determined based on areas of need including household vehicle status, SNAP enrollment, and proximity to healthy food. Since its launch in 2023, the mobile market has been a tremendous success.¹¹ Although an official community impact report is forthcoming, it is clear based on the community feedback and rampant sales that the mobile market has made a tremendous impact on the city of Lexington.

Recommendations: The mobile market has had a tremendous impact on the communities it serves. However, there remains significant need. We recommend that the Lexington-Fayette County government collaborate with the Office of Planning to incentivize the development of grocery stores in under-resourced areas. Previous studies in New York City and Philadelphia have demonstrated that by removing zoning codes that discourage the growth of supermarkets, governments can incentivize the construction of new supermarkets in disadvantaged areas.¹² In addition, density bonuses that allocate more floor space to developing grocery stores have also proved key to success. Moreover, removing requirements regarding the number of parking spaces has proved highly beneficial for the development of grocery stores within under-resourced urban communities.¹³

In addition, studies have demonstrated that poor public transportation to grocery stores is a prominent driver of food insecurity. Within the United States, nearly 31% of food-insecure households do not own a vehicle, which poses significant limitations to accessing grocery stores.¹⁴ We recommend that the Lexington-Fayette County government collaborate with the Office of Planning to analyze, fund, and reroute existing systems of public transportation to improve ease of access from communities classified as food deserts to grocery stores. Using agent-based models to study the interactions between people, places, and time, LFUCG can provide a strategic, timely, and cost-effective method of addressing food insecurity within the city.¹⁵

¹¹ LEX TV, “Mobile Market Press Conference.”

¹² Daniel Chapple, “Grocery Store Development in Recognized Food Deserts,” Sustainable Development Code, n.d., <https://sustainablecitycode.org/brief/grocery-store-development-in-recognized-food-deserts/>.

¹³ Chapple, “Grocery Store Development.”

¹⁴ Anna Sisk et al., “Connecting People to Food,” *Journal of Transport & Health* 31 (July 1, 2023): 101627, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jth.2023.101627>.

¹⁵ Anna Sisk et al., “Connecting People to Food: A Network Approach to Alleviating Food Deserts.”

III. Area for Growth: Access to Healthcare

Observations: While Lexington, Kentucky is competitive in its quality of care with an emphasis on resources from UK Healthcare, Lexington must address the underlying issue of who has access to these resources. While quality of care may be adequate in certain areas, gaps in income exacerbated by a history of segregation have created disparities in access to healthcare. Historic redlining and segregation have pushed many African-American Lexingtonians into “hazardous” areas throughout the north and east sides of Lexington.¹⁶ According to the American Hospital Association, 3.6 million people in the United States cannot obtain adequate medical care due to transportation issues.¹⁷ Today, most high-quality healthcare facilities are in Southern Lexington; this poses a barrier to underserved families in Northern Lexington, for whom transportation can be difficult. Moreover, these areas lack the proper investments needed to place healthcare facilities in low-income areas, further exacerbating access issues regarding the facility placement and transportation to facilities.

Existing Initiatives: Several initiatives have been taken to address areas of disparity within the city. The University of Kentucky Healthcare system has announced a two-billion-dollar expansion to increase primary care opportunities in underserved areas of Lexington. Additionally, according to UK Healthcare, 2% of Kentuckians age 16 and older have no access to transportation.¹⁸ To address this disparity, UK Healthcare has implemented pediatric mobile health clinics and recently partnered with HealthFirst Bluegrass to launch a mobile health clinic program for Fayette County Public Schools during the summer. These mobile units offer free vaccines, physicals, and more. Lexington also partners with Uber Health, which connects patients to ride services for appointments and prescriptions.

¹⁶ Mayor’s Commission for Racial Equity and Justice. 2023. “Mayor’s Commission for Racial Equity and Justice Report to Mayor Linda Gorton.” <https://www.lexingtonky.gov/sites/default/files/2020-10/Racial%20Justice%20Equality%20Report%20FINAL%5B1%5D.pdf>.

¹⁷ “Social Determinants of Health Series: Transportation and the Role of Hospitals | AHA.” 2017. American Hospital Association. November 15, 2017. <https://www.aha.org/aharet-guides/2017-11-15-social-determinants-health-series-transportation-and-role-hospitals>.

¹⁸ “Kentucky Children’s Hospital Mobile Unit.” UK HealthCare. <https://ukhealthcare.uky.edu/kentucky-childrens-hospital-mobile-unit>.

Recommendations: Many community members voiced that one of the main issues of access is that valuable information is not getting to the correct people. In other words, while current interventions might be taking place, if the people they are striving to help don't know they exist, then there is no impact. More strides can be made to intentionally advertise community resources in the North and East sides (schools, clubhouses, and even prisons). In addition, partnerships with UK Healthcare should be utilized to place specialized services in low-income areas throughout the Northside and expand the FCPS mobile health clinics through UK Healthcare. While UK Healthcare already has a mobile health clinic catered towards children, Lexington could continue to target disparities with a mobile health clinic program available to low-income adults. A partnership between UK Health and LFUCG to create a mobile clinic would streamline care for in-need individuals by alleviating the burden of transportation.

IV. Area for Growth: Mental Health Services

Observations: Mental health services pose a significant area for growth within Lexington. A study in May 2022 found that of adults in Kentucky who reported experiencing symptoms of anxiety and depressive disorders, 35.2% reported needing counseling or therapy but not receiving it in the past four weeks, compared to the U.S. average of 28.2%.¹⁹ Through studies like this and first-hand concerns voiced to us in community interviews, it has become apparent that quality mental health care can be improved in Lexington alongside solutions that market access to care. The issues at hand are concentrated within three major categories: access to affordable mental health counseling at large, childhood trauma, and lack of restorative justice programs addressing mental health rather than the immediate prison pipeline.

Existing Interventions: There are several private mental health clinics in Lexington concentrated in the South, but according to community members, there haven't been many strides taken by the city of Lexington to address mental health, especially in low-income areas where it is

¹⁹ "Mental Health and Substance Use State Fact Sheets | KFF." 2023. KFF. March 20, 2023. <https://www.kff.org/statedata/mental-health-and-substance-use-state-fact-sheets/kentucky/>.

needed the most. Lexington recently made improvements towards mental health from a policy perspective through its mental health crisis response team. This team not only utilizes a full-time mental health professional to respond to calls but also incentivizes additional mental health training for police officers through overtime pay and will work to reduce the number of police officers who respond to mental health calls to provide more specialized care. Additionally, to address the lack of school counselors in Fayette County Schools, the Chair of the Equity Council for the Fayette County school system, Abdul Muhammad, has implemented multiple social workers to help address childhood trauma observed in many students.

Recommendations: Second is a leading cause of death in children aged 10-14.²⁰ For Lexington to address this national crisis, there must be an emphasis put on acknowledging and treating mental health in children at school. The mobile health clinic available to FCPS students during the summer is a great place to start by adding free or affordable mental health services (counseling, therapy, etc.) to its current resources. There have been several models across the country, namely a mobile drug and mental health counseling clinic in Washington run by a non-profit called Lydia Place. In this model, the clinic drives directly to patients to provide mental health and drug resources. By partnering with a non-profit in the area or UK Healthcare, the city of Lexington could provide a hybrid model of Lydia Place's mobile mental health clinic and the current FCPS mobile health clinic that provides mental health services and counseling to the citizens of Northeastern Lexington.

Additionally, after talking with One Lexington Director Devine Carama we recommend launching a similar initiative focusing on mental health and substance abuse. This initiative could increase access to mental health education, explaining how to identify signs of mental distress and how to organize safe spaces where children can come together and talk about the struggles they share. Through partnerships with prominent community organizations such as UK Healthcare and the Boys and Girls Club, resources can be disseminated to children in the area to address the crisis at a young age.

²⁰ "FastStats." Child Health. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/child-health.htm>.

V. Area for Growth: Primary Care Services

Observations: Based on conversations with community members and government leaders two emergent areas of need have been recognized: a lack of primary care among Black and low-income Lexington residents, and a significant strain on emergency medical services. These areas of need are intrinsically intertwined. Studies have demonstrated that communities with strong primary care systems have higher quality of life and lower rates of illness and death than their counterparts.²¹ Patients connected to primary care providers have significantly improved health outcomes in nearly every measure compared to patients without. These patients receive early diagnoses and interventions, considerably improving their health outcomes.²² Without strong primary care, the Emergency Room is patients' only option. This phenomenon places unnecessary stress on both patients and emergency medicine. Without primary care providers, patients often wait until their condition grows unbearable, increasing the risk of severe disease and mortality. ED copays are significantly higher than those of PCPs and other specialists. Moreover, patients do not receive specialized care regarding their specific illness. The additional influx of patients who do not fit the needs of the ED puts a significant strain on emergency health resources, including ambulance resources, and increases provider wait time.²³

Existing Interventions: The University of Kentucky Healthcare system has announced a two-billion-dollar expansion to expand primary care opportunities within the city. The university will open four primary care facilities, including “one in an underserved area of Lexington.” Moreover, the university plans to invest in efforts to increase the diversity and quantity of primary care providers within the city.²⁴ In addition, LexTran has established Wheels Paratransit, a subsidized, door-to-door public transportation system complementary to Lexington residents with disabilities. Conversations

²¹ Azza Eissa et al., “Implementing High-Quality Primary Care through a Health Equity Lens,” *The Annals of Family Medicine* 20, no. 2 (February 14, 2022): 2785, <https://doi.org/10.1370/afm.2785>.

²² Eissa et al., “Implementing High-Quality Primary Care.”

²³ Gregory Jasani et al., “Association between Primary Care Availability and Emergency Medical Services Utilization,” *The Journal of Emergency Medicine* 64, no. 4 (April 1, 2023): 448–54, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jemermed.2023.01.002>.

²⁴ Monica Kast, “UK HealthCare Plans \$2 Billion Expansion in the Coming Years,” Lexington Herald Leader, April 28, 2023, <https://www.kentucky.com/news/local/education/article274694171.html>.

with community members in subsidized, low-income housing have indicated that this service is a source of relief.²⁵

Recommendations: Within Fayette County, the patient-to-primary care provider ratio is 1:806. Notably, this ratio is below the national recommendation (1:1000).²⁶ Lexington has primary care providers; the disparity lies in the resources that connect families with primary care providers and maintain continuity of care. Previous studies have evaluated the most significant barriers to receiving primary care as transportation, travel distance, and limited physician availability.²⁷ For example, a single mother who lives 45 minutes from the nearest doctor's office, ends work at 6:00, and does not have a car would face significant difficulty bringing her child to a primary care provider.

We recommend that LFUCG partner with prominent healthcare stakeholders such as the University of Kentucky to address the following barriers to healthcare within Lexington: transportation, travel distance, and limited physician ability. Incentivizing the movement of primary care physicians to clinics in Northern Lexington will be a crucial aspect of increasing primary care throughout the city. This incentivization should follow prior studies analyzing physician movement, including *Factors Influencing Physicians' Choice of Workplace*. This study demonstrates that tax reductions and overall wage increases have been proven to be the primary drivers of physician recruitment and can provide a framework for LFUCG as the government navigates the equitable distribution of primary care throughout the city.²⁸ Moreover, evening shifts for primary care can be financially incentivized, allowing working families more flexibility to take care of their family's health. Partnerships with prominent healthcare stakeholders such as the University of Kentucky and other healthcare providers will be crucial throughout these processes. Public transportation within the city of Lexington remains a recurring theme, particularly regarding access to healthcare. Conversations

²⁵ Lextran. "Wheels Paratransit," Accessed July 13, 2024, <https://lextran.com/accessibility/wheels-paratransit/>.

²⁶ "Fayette, Kentucky," County Health Rankings & Roadmaps, 2024, <https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/health-data/kentucky/fayette?year=2024>.

²⁷ Gregory Jasani et al., "Association between Primary Care Availability and Emergency Medical Services Utilization," *The Journal of Emergency Medicine* 64, no. 4 (April 1, 2023): 448–54, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jemermed.2023.01.002>.

²⁸ Maria El Koussa et al., "Factors Influencing Physicians' Choice of Workplace: Systematic Review of Drivers of Attrition and Policy Interventions to Address Them," *Journal of Global Health* 6, no. 2 (September 1, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.7189/jogh.06.020403>.

with community members at a local subsidized housing community have led us to believe that services such as LexTran are extremely beneficial to the community. Expanding these services, particularly around schedules of working families, could pose a significant community benefit in connecting low-income families within the city with primary care providers.

Education

I. Area for Growth: Mental Health Support in Schools

Observations: Throughout our conversation with Mr. Tracy Bruno, superintendent chief of staff for LFUCG public schools, Mr. Bruno emphasized the need for mental health support for students. When children come into school having experienced traumatic events at home, academic and social performance is inhibited. Mr. Bruno described that currently, teachers are forced to deal with the side effects of trauma, such as acting out and poor academic performance. Mental health issues are particularly prevalent in low-income neighborhoods, where students are more likely to witness violence and other traumatic events.²⁹ In order for education to be any kind of “equalizer,” students must be able to come to school with the same ability to focus and learn. While a school cannot control what is occurring in a child’s home life, mental health professionals can offer children coping skills from a young age.

Existing Initiatives: Currently, Fayette County Public Schools have available mental health resources on their website. FCPS has over ninety district mental health officers. Many schools have guidance counselors, but it is often up to the students or parents to reach out to them and initiate care.

Recommendations: Increasing funding for access to mental health treatment in schools would be an important step towards improving mental health in schools. Creating a staff position that supports coordination between school and outpatient mental health professionals could be an important avenue for students to receive the appropriate level of care that they need in a manner that is convenient for them. One solution that was considered and eventually discarded was the implementation of a mental health curriculum in schools. While preventative approaches are often the most heralded in medicine, mental health poses an awareness paradox; awareness of symptoms can

²⁹ Kataoka, Sheryl, Lisa H. Jaycox, Marleen Wong, Erum Nadeem, Audra Langley, Lingqi Tang, and Bradley D. Stein. 2011. “Effects on School Outcomes in Low-Income Minority Youth: Preliminary Findings From a Community-Partnered Study of a School Trauma Intervention.” PubMed Central (PMC). January 1, 2011. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3287975/>.

cause children to pathologize any difficult emotion they may face.³⁰ Mental health care professionals within the school system should use their resources in order to help students who are most at risk. Teachers should be able to refer students to mental health professionals within schools using a streamlined approach. Asking for more funding is not an original nor easy request. However, the benefits of improved student mental health will ensure that education functions as close to “the great equalizer” as possible.

II. Area for Growth: Teacher Recruitment and Retention

Observations: There is a national teacher shortage, and Lexington has not been immune to that pinch. According to research from the Annenberg Institute for Educational Equity at Brown University, Kentucky has about 2,000 teacher vacancies this year. The state also ranks below average for optimal teacher-student ratio, with 32 teachers for every 1,000 students enrolled in public schools.³¹ According to Mr. Tracy Bruno, many would-be teachers are deterred from the profession by teachers on social media who talk about the hardships of modern teaching, including dealing with unruly children and demanding parents alike. Although Fayette County has the highest paid teachers in the state, with experienced educators having the ability to earn a yearly salary of over \$85,000 with a bachelor’s degree in 2024,³² Bruno noted that they still struggle to attract and retain teachers. Bruno also stressed the importance of quality teachers, since they are usually the ones who interact with students daily, shaping their education and aspirations. While recruiting and retaining any teachers must be a goal of the county, it is imperative that recruiting a diverse teaching staff be a priority.

We had the privilege of speaking with Mr. Abdul Mohammed, the market president for Wes Banco who also serves as the chair of the equity council for the Fayette County school system. He recognizes the importance of teacher diversity; when students see educators who look like themselves, they are more able to connect with teachers as a role model. A diverse teaching force is of paramount

³⁰ Barry, Ellen. 2024. “Are We Talking Too Much About Mental Health?” *The New York Times*, May 6, 2024.

³¹ “Where Are All the Teachers? Breaking Down America’s Teacher Shortage Crisis in 5 Charts.” *USA TODAY*, March 19, 2024. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/graphics/2024/03/19/teacher-shortage-crisis-explained/72958393007/>.

³² “Salary Schedules.” *Fayette County Public Schools*. https://lexingtonky.news/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/K_3_FY24SalarySchedule52223FINAL_0.pdf.

importance as Fayette County Public Schools (FCPS) become increasingly diverse. For the first time ever, FCPS is a majority-minority district.³³ This diversity, which includes over thirty spoken languages by students, demands to be matched by the teaching staff. Furthermore, In the 2023 Economic Opportunity and Education report, the committee recommended that the education officials investigate high rates of minority attrition within post-secondary education institutions.³⁴ While these questions must be raised on a local level in coordination with the specific challenges that each school faces, a trend that is seen on a national level is that increased teacher diversity can help close the minority attrition gap.³⁵

Existing Interventions: In 2023, the Economic and Education Subcommittee’s fourth recommendation suggested eliminating the requirement of the Praxis Core Academic Skills for Educators, a standardized test that aspiring teachers must pass to work in schools. Experts in the education field have condemned the Praxis as a deterrent for minority students looking to enter the teaching field, and “the committee, along with public comments, supports the need to increase the number of Black and minority teachers—including men—hired in Fayette County Public Schools, including multilingual educators.”³⁶ The issue of educator diversity has been on Fayette County’s mind and enjoys wide-spread support. However, conversations with parents and those involved in Lexington’s public schools have made clear that work remains to be done

Recommendations: Recruiting at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) is one step that the school committee can take to attract diverse candidates to work in FCPS.³⁷ Kentucky is

³³ “Overview of Fayette County Schools.” 2024. US News and World Reports. 2024.
<https://www.usnews.com/education/k12/kentucky/districts/fayette-county-107072#:~:text=Fayette%20County%20Public%20Schools%20contains,of%20students%20are%20economically%20disadvantaged.>

³⁴ “Education Summary.”
<https://www.lexingtonky.gov/sites/default/files/2020-10/Education%20%26%20Economic%20Opportunity%20Report.pdf>

³⁵ “Teacher Diversity: An Essential Element for Student Well-Being and Success.” 2024. Educators Rising. January 22, 2024. <https://educatorsrising.org/teacher-diversity-an-essential-element-for-student-well-being-and-success/>.

³⁶ Mayor Linda Gorton’s Commission on Racial Justice and Equality, Education and Economic Opportunity Sub-committee, Sharon Price et al. 2021.
<https://www.lexingtonky.gov/sites/default/files/2020-10/Education%20%26%20Economic%20Opportunity%20Report.pdf>

³⁷ “HBCU Recruitment Strategies.” Department of Labor.
<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ofccp/compliance-assistance/outreach/hbcu-initiative/recruitment-strategies.>

home to two HBCUs: Kentucky State University in Frankfort and Simmons College in Louisville. Kentucky State has a program in education that could serve as a pipeline for FCPS schools. Establishing and nurturing authentic connections will help facilitate a diverse teaching force for years to come. It is worth mentioning that Black teachers report higher job satisfaction when they have other coworkers that look like them. In a Harvard report on Education, one study participant remarked, “It’s tough when there’s no one else here... I can make friends, and I can talk to whomever I want, but... it’s not easy for me”³⁸

III. Area for Growth: Funding Allocation Regarding Public and Charter Schools

Observations: Although privately run, charter schools rely on public funding. Kentucky is currently the only state in the United States without charter schools. Because charter schools and public schools share funding, opposition to charter schools is based on the concern that public schools will lose funding upon charter school implementation. Charter schools have been marketed as the solution to weakened public school systems; however, education policy experts reject this claim, noting that average test scores are not consistently better than their public school counterparts. Previous reporting has demonstrated how, within charter schools, improved test scores often indicate harmful discipline measures rather than deeper learning in the classroom.³⁹

Because funding for charter schools is currently illegal in the state of Kentucky, there are currently no charter schools operating.⁴⁰ Public opposition to this ruling, however, indicates that

³⁸ Simon, Nicole S., Susan Moore Johnson, Stefanie K. Reinhorn, and The Project on the Next Generation of Teachers. 2015. “The Challenge of Recruiting and Hiring Teachers of Color: Lessons From Six High-Performing, High-Poverty, Urban Schools.” *Working Paper*. Harvard Graduate School of Education. https://projectnxt.gse.harvard.edu/files/gse-projectnxt/files/the_challenge_of_recruiting_and_hiring_teachers_of_color_diversity_july_2015.pdf.

³⁹Peter Greene, 2024, “Four Ways Charter Schools Undermine Good Education Policy,” *Forbes*, February 20, 2024, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/petergreene/2022/11/10/four-ways-charter-schools-undermine-good-education-policy/>.

⁴⁰ Rebecca Hanchett, 2024, “You Asked About This Year’s School Choice Amendment. Here’s What We Learned.” LINKky, June 17, 2024, <https://linkky.com/news/2024/06/13/kentucky-school-choice-amendment/>.

charter schools will be implemented in Kentucky in the near future.⁴¹ By introducing school choice, charter schools, and voucher programs, Kentucky's public schools would lose resources and funding, which will only further issues in public school systems, especially in low-income areas in Lexington.⁴²

Charter schools do not promote educational equity. In our interview, Tracy Bruno remarked that he could predict the socioeconomic status of any Fayette County student based on the public school they attended. The difference in funding capabilities between high and low-income school PTAs has already created inequities within FCPS. The implementation of charter schools would only strain these funding gaps by removing funds from the schools that need them most. Although those in favor of charter schools argue that this competitive pressure can boost public school performance, it is impossible to improve student performance when the resources to do so are diverted. Charter schools are selective, excluding students with disabilities or disadvantaged backgrounds. This could further inequity within Fayette County public schools. The alleged competitive advantages of charter schools would only exacerbate existing equity and funding issues within FCPS.

Existing Interventions: Although charter schools were authorized in Kentucky in 2017, charter school funding has been ruled unconstitutional by the state courts. However, an amendment is currently on the ballot to allow funding. If this is passed, charter schools, private school vouchers, and school choice can all be implemented in Kentucky.

Recommendations: In the case that policies regarding charter schools shift, we do not recommend the establishment of charter schools in Lexington. Drawing money out of public schools would likely worsen current equity issues within low-income area schools, and the selectiveness of charter schools will disadvantage disabled students and those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Though charter schools would not promote educational equity, we recommend that Lexington

⁴¹Sylvia Goodman, 2023, "Republican Lawmakers Promise a 'School Choice' Amendment Will Come up in Kentucky's Legislative Session," *Louisville Public Media*, November 15, 2023, <https://www.lpm.org/news/2023-11-14/republican-lawmakers-promise-a-school-choice-amendment-will-come-up-in-kentuckys-legislative-session>.

⁴²Tyler O'Neill, 2024, "Kentucky Lawmakers Introduce School Choice Bill," *Spectrum News Kentucky*, January 28, 2024, <https://spectrumnews1.com/ky/louisville/news/2024/01/27/house-bill-two-school-choice>.

improve and leverage its existing public transportation system to create more regional school choice for Fayette County families.

IV. Area for Growth: Public Transportation

Observations: Public transportation within Lexington represents a significant area for improvement. One of the biggest problems for community members who want to use public transportation is its limited coverage and accessibility. Many neighborhoods throughout the city are not served by Lextran, the city's public bus system, making it difficult for Lexingtonians to access their work, school, and other essential services. Without a car, residents are "trapped in an uphill battle" when they leave their homes. As the urban service boundary expands, this problem will only grow.⁴³ The benefits of public services such as affordable housing and healthcare clinics cannot be reaped if these resources are inaccessible without cars.

Furthermore, many LexTran bus routes have frequent detours or construction-related closures, causing a community perception of unreliability. If the buses frequently fail to arrive on time to their destinations, community members will not trust nor rely on Lextran or any public transportation. There are also no late-night or early-morning bus services, which alienates those who work non-traditional hours. For those who cannot provide their means of transportation, educational opportunities are restricted. For example, many students cannot participate in extracurricular programs, limiting academic performance.

Existing Initiatives: The city has established Lextran, which provides bus access in many locations throughout the city.⁴⁴ A coalition of services throughout Lexington has begun the program Building a United Interfaith Lexington through Direct Action (BUILD) to advocate for a micro-transit system based on a service established in Birmingham, Alabama.⁴⁵ In this system, Lexingtonians could order a ride similar to Uber or Lyft but only have to pay the bus fee, establishing

⁴³ Karla Ward, "Lexington Churches Want a Transportation Solution for People 'Trapped in Transit Deserts,'" DART, December 7, 2023, <https://thedartcenter.org/our-impact/accessible-public-transportation/2023/11/lexington-churches-want-a-transportation-solution-for-people-trapped-in-transit-deserts/>.

⁴⁴ "Lextran." City of Lexington. <https://www.lexingtonky.gov/lextran>.

⁴⁵ Ward, "Lexington Churches."

more flexibility in the public transportation system.⁴⁶ In addition, the Lexington Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) has proposed two projects. The High Street Corridor Safety and Mobility Improvements Project is working to reconstruct trafficked roads to increase safety and pedestrian accessibility. The second, the Richmond Road Restricted Crossing U-Turn Project will create a U-Turn intersection that reduces vehicle congestion surrounding a local elementary school.⁴⁷ In addition, Lextran recently received a federal grant of \$4.2 million to purchase six new low-emission buses. This donation will hopefully lead to more coverage and accessibility of public transportation.⁴⁸

Recommendations: The unreliability and inconsistencies of public transportation have created wariness and a negative attitude towards it by the citizens of Lexington. By altering routes to make the system as reliable as possible, the city can establish trust and a positive relationship between Lextran and the community. Because of these current attitudes, there is limited communal knowledge of how to use the public bus systems. Hosting education sessions to inform the community could build a widespread understanding of public transportation systems. In addition, we recommend that the city continue to support projects proposed by BUILD and the Lexington Area Metropolitan Planning Organization, focusing on broader projects such as a micro-transit system that implements specific traffic and intersection solutions.

Substantial improvement in public transportation systems can serve as the backbone of school choice and equity. In our conversation, Mr. Bruno reflected on how efficient and reliable public transportation supported school choice in Nashville, where he previously worked in the school system. Improvements in transportation have the opportunity to change this: with better public transportation, low-income students zoned into underperforming schools can access public schools they might not have otherwise. The public transportation crisis must be solved to improve equity within the Lexington-Fayette public school system.

⁴⁶ “Lextran”

⁴⁷ “Public Notification of Proposed Amendments to the Lexington Area MPO’s 2045 Metropolitan Transportation Plan,” City of Lexington, July 27, 2022, <https://www.lexingtonky.gov/news/07-27-2022/public-notification-proposed-amendments-lexington-area-mpos-2045-metropolitan>.

⁴⁸ “Lextran”

Arts, Culture, and Tourism

I. Area for Growth: Inclusion of Black Historical Narratives

Observations: Lexington's tourism and arts industries have historically neglected the narratives of Black communities. On the surface, Lexington is known for its horse racing, bourbon, and basketball. Yet the contributions and histories of African Americans within these sectors are often overlooked or separated rather than being integrated into this broader historical and cultural narrative. Black jockeys played a pivotal role in the early years of horse racing, yet their contributions received minimal recognition in tourism materials in Lexington. In conversations with historians and art curators, we often heard about the disparities between representation and reality; historical landmarks and museums in Lexington focus predominantly on white narratives, leaving out critical stories from Lexington's history. Museums have limited exhibits on the contributions of Black residents, and historical tours usually mention them as an additional asset, if at all. This distinct separation between general Lexington history implies that Black history is an addendum to the city's history, as opposed to events that are inextricably linked to the city's past and future.

Existing Initiatives: There have been notable endeavors in integrating Black history into the general narratives of Lexington. For example, the library exhibits artwork encompassing Lexington's rich history of horses and horse racing by including many prominent Black jockeys in its foyer. Similarly, local museum owner Mandy Higgins has made efforts to remodel the reputation of the Lexington History Museum and include marginalized histories – for example, unequal treatment of Black jockeys, Coach Rupp's history of discrimination, and the neglected Black bourbon distillers. Hamlet preservation is another intervention to promote equity within arts and tourism. Lexington has a rich history of primarily African-American settlements and the hamlets that lived within them. A problem not unique to Lexington is the physical upkeep it takes to keep these settlements alive. Similarly, The Sense of Place movement has made significant progress in preserving these valuable

settlements, such as organizing to restore the Rosenwald School and the nearby cemetery.⁴⁹ Moreover, the committee exemplifies the support historical integration events/programs like this garner when people of color see their own represented in positions of power that have the resources to make change. Though these changes are positive, they are only the beginning to long-lasting, meaningful change that will alter the systemic biases deeply ingrained in the city.

Recommendations: The City of Lexington must be intentional when remodeling narratives to include devalued pieces of history. Similar to the steps that the Lexington History Museum has taken, areas of tourism including horses, bourbon, and basketball should acknowledge the Black pioneers who paved the way. Plaques should be established near Rupp Arena telling the full history of Adolf Rupp's career, including his racist decisions surrounding the recruitment of Black players.⁵⁰ These plaques, similar to those downtown like Cheapside, would highlight important history but also symbolize the steps made towards a diverse and flourishing basketball program now.

Similarly, VisitLex has some information on Black pioneers within the Bourbon industry but could use more information in their in-person office and website. While VisitLex's website has a section on Lexington's bourbon history, it focuses on its physical origins rather than the hundreds of enslaved hands that worked to provide the necessary resources and labor to make bourbon possible. These stories must be emphasized in tourist locations where Lexington's main three historical focuses are present.

Active outreach is another strategy to regain trust of those whose stories aren't represented. How can a group that has endured systematic oppression and ignorance trust a system that is content with their current, passive strategies? Regular door-to-door polls and surveys should be done in these communities in order to understand the dynamic needs of its people, and demonstrate the active goal of seriously changing based on what is needed. This will only be effective if this data is acted upon.

⁴⁹ "A Sense of Place' Initiative Launched to Celebrate and Highlight Lexington Hamlets," 2023, City of Lexington. July 7, 2023, <https://www.lexingtonky.gov/news/07-07-2023/sense-place-initiative-launched-celebrate-and-highlight-lexington-hamlets>.

⁵⁰ Sullivan, Becky. 2020. "Kentucky's Rupp Arena: A College Basketball Mecca With a Complicated Racial Past." *NPR*, August 31, 2020. <https://www.npr.org/2020/08/31/906903109/kentuckys-rupp-arena-a-college-basketball-mecca-with-a-complicated-racial-past>.

II. Area for Growth: Resistance from Non-Marginalized Groups

Observations: Even in current efforts to include Black narratives in tourism and arts, the problem of resistance from non-marginalized communities blooms. Resistance can be either intentional or an unconscious opposition to change, but its outcome is always the disenfranchisement of marginalized peoples and community division. Similar to how affordable housing is often met with resistance from current people in the area of development, interviews from community members demonstrate too much comfortability with how Lexington's history is currently told and propose a potential barrier to remodeling Lexington's history. This resistance stems from a reluctance to change the traditional narratives that have been the status quo, a precedent set by the separation of Black history from the broader Lexington history.

Existing Initiatives: It's difficult to address unconscious bias head-on, but some current interventions involve setting new precedents through upcoming Black history projects. Namely, the Underground Railroad Monument, a monument spotlighting the efforts of Lewis and Harriet Hayden, a formerly enslaved couple who escaped to continue the fight via the Underground railroad, is the first of its kind in the city.⁵¹ By continuing to set precedents like these spotlighting Black stories, Black history as a part of Lexington's history becomes more normalized and sets the standard of holistic Lexington narratives for future generations. Additionally, Councilman James Brown explained there must be more efforts to feature stories of Black celebration and how far the Black community has come despite adversity. While it is important to educate about the horrors of slavery and the struggles painted in Black history, projects like the Underground Railroad monument also highlight triumph and perseverance which could initially attract citizens of Lexington, but then provide entry into the conversations of more uncomfortable, but necessary topics.

Recommendations: The city and its citizens must open conversations regarding how to deal with difficult history and the importance of accepting Black history into formerly solidified history among generations. For example, while Coach Rupp was an amazing basketball coach and a beloved

⁵¹Passmore, Grason. 2024. "New Monument Will Share Untold Stories of the Underground Railroad." <https://www.Wkyt.Com>, March 14, 2024.

figure in sports, it is important to reiterate that acknowledging the racist aspects of NCAA basketball at the time and Rupp's resistance to putting black athletes on the team isn't an effort to condemn Kentucky basketball or change how history is written.⁵² The focus is to include the holistic story and see how Lexington has progressed. To facilitate this change and minimize resistance, Lexington should partner with organizations in the area that are already opening these conversations. Organizations like Lexington Forum establish public gatherings every month on issues about Lexington.⁵³ By partnering with Lexington Forum, the city could establish open gatherings focusing on the importance of holistic history and how Lexington's history should be remodeled to include devalued stories.

Additionally, according to studies conducted by Mandela Research, African American travelers spend \$48 billion worldwide each year and 68 percent of African American travelers would like to learn more about African American history and culture while traveling.⁵⁴ Regardless of views on integrating untold black history into Lexington history, it is undeniable black history is attractive tourism and great for the economy. Many community members and stakeholders want the best for Lexington which includes its economy which is why it would be beneficial for the city to spread these economic advantages. The City of Lexington should educate citizens on the benefits of holistic history and how boosting these untold stories gives back to all citizens.

⁵² Sullivan, Becky. 2020.

⁵³ "Community Conversations Are Happening at Lexington Forum." Lexington Forum.
<https://www.lexingtonforum.org/>.

⁵⁴ Enelow-Snyder, Sarah. 2016. "The Rise of Civil Rights Tourism in America's Deep South." *Skift*, October 21, 2016.
<https://skift.com/2016/08/25/the-rise-of-civil-rights-tourism-in-americas-deep-south/#:~:text=According%20to%20studies%20conducted%20by,history%20and%20culture%20while%20traveling.>

Housing and Gentrification

I. Area for Growth: Affordable Housing

Observations: In 2014, the Lexington Affordable Housing Fund was established; since then, Lexington has created 3,200 affordable housing units, allocating \$34 million to serve working families who earn up to 60% of the area median income.⁵⁵ The demand for these units, however, continues to outpace the supply. For example, The Alcove at Russell is filling up rapidly, illustrating the need for more units. Some housing developments such as the Oasis have a waiting list. Much of this affordable housing is located in areas with limited access to public transportation, which the majority of the residents rely on, perpetuating the cycle of poverty and limiting the residents' ability to improve their living conditions.⁵⁶ Notably, it is extremely difficult for families of all socio-economic classes to find housing, as the price of housing at all levels in Lexington is skyrocketing. In fact, Lexington has the second fastest rent growth in the United States, increasing 2.5% in the month of May.⁵⁷

The thought of “affordable” or “subsidized” housing in Lexington has resulted in significant backlash from community members, fueling a “Not In My Backyard” (NIMBY) mentality.³ Although many middle- and upper-class Lexingtonians might support the creation of affordable housing, they do not want it to be created near where they live for fear that it will detract from their property value. This tension and resistance inhibits the growth of more affordable housing in Lexington. There is also a strong trend in the location of affordable housing units. Many tend to be in the east end of town, an area that is already home to much of Lexington's low-income community¹. Establishing units in areas

⁵⁵ “The City's Newest Affordable Housing Community Opens.” 2023. City of Lexington. June 20, 2023. <https://www.lexingtonky.gov/news/06-20-2023/officials-celebrate-opening-lexingtons-newest-affordable-housing-community>.

⁵⁶ Prokos, Vasi. 2023. “BUILD Holds Rally to Identify Solutions for Lexington's Housing, Violence Issues.” DART. September 25, 2023. <https://thedartcenter.org/our-impact/affordable-housing/2023/03/build-holds-rally-to-identify-solutions-for-lexingtons-housing-violence-issues/>.

⁵⁷ Crenshaw, Darnell. 2024. “Report: Lexington Had Second Fastest Rent Growth in US in May.” *https://www.wkyt.com*, June 6, 2024. <https://www.wkyt.com/2024/06/06/report-lexington-had-second-fastest-rent-growth-us-may/>.

like this not only continues to limit low-income families' access to public transportation but also establishes socio-economic divisions within the city's housing landscape.

Existing Initiatives: The city has allocated \$34 million to the Affordable Housing Fund since 2014 and has established over 3,200 affordable housing units. This has begun to address the affordable housing crisis within the city. The amount per year is also increasing, as \$15.1 million has been allocated since 2021. One of the city's newest units, The Alcove at Russell, has amenities such as a fitness center, business center, and community room. In addition, the Office of Affordable Housing is hiring Electronic Health Information Consultants to analyze Lexington's affordable housing needs, which will help the board allocate funds to future projects.⁵⁸

Recommendations: We recommend that the city continue efforts to establish affordable housing throughout the city. These efforts, however, should be placed in economically diverse neighborhoods throughout the city, not segregated into low-income neighborhoods in Lexington. Creating affordable housing projects in just the east end or areas that lack access to public transportation will not allow residents to break a cycle of poverty and increase their living conditions. As community exposure to affordable housing increases, the stigma of subsidized housing will decrease. Working with the City Planning Commission to change strict zoning ordinances is essential to increase the socioeconomic location diversity of affordable housing units. Finally, we recommend hosting or establishing some form of education for community members to combat NIMBYism. Affordable housing projects are difficult without communal support. An informed and engaged Lexington will provide the bedrock for affordable housing to flourish.

II. Area for Growth: Expanding the Urban Service Boundary

Observations: In 1996, the Urban Service Boundary (USB) was established to protect farmland, preserve Lexington's rural hamlets, prevent urban sprawl, and encourage intentional growth within Lexington. Although many view it as inhibiting development, the land outside the boundary plays a

⁵⁸ "Office of Affordable Housing." City of Lexington.
<https://www.lexingtonky.gov/departments/office-affordable-housing>.

major economic role in Lexington. Within the Urban Service Boundary, there is a lack of housing options for middle-class renters and first-time homebuyers, such as duplexes, apartment complexes, and smaller homes.⁵⁹ In recent years, as the population within the boundary continues to increase, housing costs in Lexington are skyrocketing. In fact, Lexington had the fourth-highest rent increase in the USA in 2021. Expansion of the USB has been heralded as one potential option; however, there remains the concern that this expansion would be a short-term solution to the housing crisis. Many middle-class Lexingtonians have no choice but to move outside the USB to purchase homes. Expanding the USB would create more affordable opportunities for people to live and work in Lexington,⁶⁰ but could lead to outward development instead of centralized urban growth, and would also burden an already weak public transportation system in the city.⁶¹

Existing Initiatives: In November 2023, Lexington approved the expansion of the USB by 2,800 acres in five locations as part of the Urban Growth Master Plan. The planning commission is taking an extensive public input to ensure that development in these areas aligns with communal needs. As discussed above, the city has constructed over 3,000 affordable housing units within the USB to address inflated housing costs. Affordable housing mandates and rent control policies are also helping to maintain neighborhood stability.⁶²

Recommendations: Any expansion of the USB, change in policy, or development within the boundary must be planned and executed with much caution, considering housing costs, public transportation, environmental impact, and preservation of Lexington's rural landscape. Within the boundary, the city must utilize the available land to create diverse housing options that can accommodate residents of all incomes and place this housing in strategic locations close to jobs,

⁵⁹Fayette Alliance. 2024. "The Urban Service Boundary and the Future of Lexington-Fayette County." Fayette Alliance. February 12, 2024. <https://fayettealliance.com/urbanserviceboundary/>.

⁶⁰James, Josh. 2023. "Lexington's Urban Service Boundary Set to Expand Under Latest Council Decision." *WUKY*, June 2, 2023. <https://www.wuky.org/local-regional-news/2023-06-02/lexingtons-urban-service-boundary-set-to-expand-under-city-leaders-latest-decision>.

⁶¹ Fayette Alliance 2024.

⁶² Anderson, Kit. 2024. "The Urban Service Boundary" CivicLex. January 12, 2024. <https://www.civiclex.org/big-issues/urban-service-boundary>.

schools, and other resources. By doing this, the city can set themselves up for a future of sustainable urban growth.

III. Area for Growth: Permanent Displacement of Black Communities

Observation: Lexington has a rich history of African American communities, many which have faced forms of permanent displacement. Permanent displacement stems from historical economic discrimination against marginalized groups. Many Black communities are constantly being bought out of their neighborhoods and homes by corporations and wealthier tenants. This permanent cycle of displacement prevents the accumulation of generational wealth.⁶³ Cadentown is just one example of a historically Black hamlet that is now threatened by gentrification and rising property values in Lexington.⁶⁴

The gentrification within Lexington has led to significant increases in property taxes and housing costs, displacing long-term Black residents. According to our interview with Marvin Young, homes that once cost \$10,000 now sell for over \$250,000. Aggressive property code enforcement and predatory real estate practices further exacerbate this displacement. The displacement leads to a loss of community cohesion, economic instability, and general stress related to the resident's state of living. Long-term residents are often forced to leave their neighborhoods and what they have known their whole life, disrupting their lives and the historical significance of their neighborhoods. Clearly, permanent displacement has already laid its roots in Lexington.

Existing Initiatives: The Lexington-Fayette Urban County Government (LFUCG) has created projects aimed at mitigating this displacement. One significant initiative is the Affordable Housing Fund, which was established with an initial allocation of \$3 million in 2014. It receives annual allocations of around \$2 million in the city's budget. This fund supports the entire process of

⁶³"Understanding Gentrification and Displacement," The Uprooted Project, <https://sites.utexas.edu/gentrificationproject/understanding-gentrification-and-displacement/#:~:text=Gentrification%20is%20a%20process%20of,resulting%20in%20the%20displacement%20of.>

⁶⁴Metcalf, Sabriel. "Land, Family and African American History Shines on Cadentown and Other Hamlets." Spectrum News Kentucky, June 19, 2023.

acquiring and maintaining affordable housing for Lexingtonians that qualify.⁶⁵ Additionally, The LFUCG has been working on projects like “A Sense of Place” steering committee which aims to preserve historically Black neighborhoods and hamlets.

Organizations like the Kentucky U.S. Freedmen Coalition, directed by Marvin Young, work to support Black communities from Kentucky to reverse the effects of slavery, Black codes, and other vast human rights violations committed against Black communities. Efforts include helping residents keep their homes up to code and providing food and advocacy for the homeless. The Homeless and Housing Coalition of Kentucky (HHCK) also advocates for policies to expand access to affordable housing and provide renter protections for people in danger of being displaced from their community.⁶⁶ While these interventions provide some relief, there are significant gaps that still remain. Inconsistent property appraisals lead to uneven tax burdens on Black homeowners, and the discrepancies between city efforts and community needs are often gaping.⁶⁷ Additionally, the efforts to spread the awareness of available resources aren’t optimal and many who need assistance the most slip under the radar.

Recommendations: Along the lines of policy, there should be a strong push for standardizing property appraisals. Consistent and well-designed frameworks for appraising properties will prevent unfair tax hikes that disproportionately affect Black homeowners. According to the UC Berkeley Housing Lab, new technologies have the potential to equalize home appraisal measures. For example, True Footage, a property appraisal tool, has been programmed to gather data that is used to determine home value. Appraisal by an algorithmic third party will decrease the implicit bias that often leads to home devaluation. However, technology is not perfect. Having multiple appraisers work on a single

⁶⁵City of Lexington. “Office of Affordable Housing,” n.d.
<https://www.lexingtonky.gov/departments/office-affordable-housing>.

⁶⁶ Homeless and Housing Coalition of Kentucky. “State Priorities — Homeless and Housing Coalition of Kentucky,” n.d. <https://www.hhck.org/state-priorities>.

⁶⁷ Andre M. Perry, and Jonathan Rothwell, 2022, “How Racial Bias in Appraisals Affects the Devaluation of Homes in majority-Black Neighborhoods,” *Brookings*, December 5, 2022,
<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/how-racial-bias-in-appraisals-affects-the-devaluation-of-homes-in-majority-black-neighborhoods/>.

property has the potential to balance implicit biases.⁶⁸ While these measures will serve to alleviate appraisal inequality, their implementation will require public-sector regulation. As for community engagement, increasing the spread of information about housing assistance programs will be crucial to promote awareness. This can be done through grassroots efforts at community centers, churches, and various local organizations. The Kentucky U.S. Freedmen Coalition led by Marvin Young has been an exemplary force in this regard.

IV. Knowledge of Housing, Credit, and Homeownership

Observations: The lack of knowledge about housing, credit, and homeownership disproportionately affects Black communities in both Lexington and the United States. Historical barriers, such as discriminatory housing policies and predatory loan requirements have widened the homeownership gap between Black and White households. As of 2021, the Black homeownership rate in the U.S. was 44%, while the White homeownership rate was 73%.⁶⁹ Low homeownership rates have been shown to promote vulnerability due to displacement and gentrification. In Lexington, the impacts of gentrification and rising property values further exacerbate these issues. In addition to these trends, limited education on credit and financial management is another reason why lower-income residents may have a harder time understanding the complexities of buying a home.

Existing Initiatives: Lexington offers several programs aimed at improving housing knowledge and financial literacy. The Housing Stabilization Program provides mediation with landlords, access to legal counsel, and rent assistance to prevent evictions.⁷⁰ The Team Kentucky Homeowner Assistance Fund offers up to \$35,000 to help homeowners with mortgage payments, property taxes, insurance,

⁶⁸ Hannah Gable, 2022, “Reducing Bias in Home Appraisals: The Roles for Policy and Technology,” Turner Center, March 3, 2022, <https://turnercenter.berkeley.edu/research-and-policy/reducing-bias-in-home-appraisals-the-roles-for-policy-and-technology/>.

⁶⁹ Christina Ford, “Lexington-area Realtors Work to Build Black Wealth Through Real Estate,” LEX 18 News - Lexington, KY (WLEX), April 11, 2024, <https://www.lex18.com/news/lex-in-depth/lexington-area-realtors-work-to-build-black-wealth-through-real-estate#:~:text=Black%20homeownership%20was%2044%25%2C%20while,points%20higher%2C%20at%2073%25.>

⁷⁰ “Housing Stabilization Expands Services for Tenants Facing Eviction,” City of Lexington, May 2, 2023, <https://www.lexingtonky.gov/news/05-02-2023/housing-stabilization-expands-services-tenants-facing-eviction.>

and utility costs.⁷¹ Lastly, the city’s First-Time Homebuyer Program helps first-time homebuyers buy homes by providing “non-repayable mortgage subsidies and 0 – 2% loans to lower to moderate income first-time homebuyers”.⁷²

Recommendations: Increasing funding for housing counseling programs that provide education on credit, financial management, and the homebuying process will be instrumental to increasing the amount of homebuyers in Lexington, especially Black residents. The Department of Housing and Urban Development’s “Let’s Make Home the Goal” campaign demonstrates the effectiveness of this strategy perfectly, showing that bridging the gaps in knowledge and giving constant financial and educational support helps close that racial homeowner gap.⁷³ Implementation of this program on a municipal level within Lexington could achieve similar results within the city.

⁷¹ Kentucky Government. “Gov. Beshear Announces Team Kentucky Homeowner Assistance Fund,” February 7, 2022. <https://www.kentucky.gov/Pages/Activity-stream.aspx?n=GovernorBeshear&prId=1190>.

⁷² City of Lexington. “First-Time Homebuyer Program,” <https://www.lexingtonky.gov/first-time-homebuyer-program>.

⁷³ HUD.gov / U.S. Department of Housing And Urban Development (HUD). “HUD Commemorates National Homeownership Month With Launch of Housing,” June 1, 2023. https://www.hud.gov/press/press_releases_media_advisories/HUD_No_23_105.

Police, Law, and Justice

I. Area for Growth: Community Transparency

Observations: National trends have seen a decline in police trust in recent years. Incidents that received national attention such as the murders of George Floyd and Breona Taylor have rattled the sense of security that police officers are meant to provide in an urban environment.⁷⁴ Despite Lexington's crime rate falling below the national average in recent years,⁷⁵ we have observed these same seeds of distrust in Lexington's citizens. This Summer, we had the privilege of speaking to Wilbur and Doris, residents of the Oasis, a low-income housing development for seniors. When we asked them about the safety of Lexington, Doris expressed that she did not feel safe in public areas in Lexington. Though she had been quiet for much of the interview, she spoke up to tell us about her nephew who was murdered, though no one was ever convicted. Doris went on to express that she seldom leaves the oasis, for fear that she will be a victim of gun violence. She prefers to stay out of open spaces for that same reason; "It didn't used to be like this when we were coming up," she kept reminding us. If a senior woman who uses a walker does not feel safe in Lexington, we wondered, is the city truly safe?

Our visit to the police department the following week offered us a more nuanced perspective of public safety in Lexington. When we were welcomed into the police department downtown, we were struck by the candor of the officers as we watched a presentation on the use of Flock Cameras in Lexington. It was clear that real-time intelligence monitoring was a large step forward for the department, aiding in identification and prosecution of crimes. When we asked questions about the potential for Flock Cameras to create over-policing, the officers expressed that the manpower of the department would not go to over-policing, since they are already under-staffed. The department cited

⁷⁴ Gasper et al. 2023, "Addressing the Trust Crisis," Police Chief Magazine, September 27, 2023, <https://www.policchiefmagazine.org/addressing-trust-crisis/>.

⁷⁵ "Lexington, KY Crime Rates and Safety," 2024, US News and World Reports, 2024, <https://realestate.usnews.com/places/kentucky/lexington/crime>.

under-staffing as a barrier to engaging in community policing practices that build trust in the community.

We came away from these meetings with two completely different tales of public safety in Lexington; there is a significant delta between the efforts that the police department is making and the perception of community safety among Lexingtonians. In our assessment, it is clear that the police department is taking important steps towards community safety, having reduced crime rates since their peak during the pandemic. However, both creating and mending bonds between the Lexington community and the police will take time and effort.

Existing Initiatives: The Lexington Police Department actively promotes transparency measures on its website. The website provides links that give a step-by-step overview of departmental procedures, including traffic stops and body cameras. The department has also instituted a Public Integrity Unit, which has two civilians who help to ensure that the police department is living up to its own standards of conduct. Lastly, the Lexington Police Department has a program called Police Activity League (PAL), which allows young people to register to be in a sports league led by a police officer. PAL has hosted softball, basketball, and boxing leagues, as well as choirs.⁷⁶

OneLex, an initiative led by Devine Carama, is working jointly with the police department to develop better community practices. OneLex works to create ties between government and community bodies in order to strengthen civic engagement largely through youth empowerment. Although slashed in the pandemic, funding for OneLex has allowed the organization to host programming that teaches youth to make healthy decisions and address the core of gun violence. OneLex also bolsters civic engagement by teaching young people about ways in which they can inspire change in their own communities and governments.⁷⁷

Recommendations: Using existing infrastructure is of critical importance. Lexington already has all the ingredients for improved trust between the police department and its constituents. It is evident that the Police Department has been working closely to be as engaged with the community as

⁷⁶ “Transparency.” City of Lexington. <https://www.lexingtonky.gov/police-transparency>.

⁷⁷ “ONE Lexington.” City of Lexington. <https://www.lexingtonky.gov/one-lexington>.

possible. However, it is a matter of optimizing these resources and ensuring that they reach communities who are most skeptical of the police.

One alteration we suggest to the existing PAL program is to make it more informal. Currently, the PAL program requires that students be signed up by parents and guardians. However, as we have learned from speaking with community stakeholders, low-income families often do not have the means to transport their children to and from activities that interfere with work hours. What we suggest is that the Lexington Police department model youth interaction after the Perspectives Organization in Minneapolis Minnesota, a city that was deeply wounded by the murder of George Floyd. Perspectives hosts weekly drop-in style basketball games in public parks in low-income areas and provides food for children who show up. Events hosted such as cops and boppers have modeled this approach, but often occur in more privileged neighborhoods, thus being inaccessible to many who live in higher-crime areas such as the North and East sides. Older high school students who are engaged in OneLex programming such as the It Takes a Village Summer Program could act as support staff at these events. Catalyzing connections between the police and community in an informal and accessible environment is key to building trust within the Lexington community.

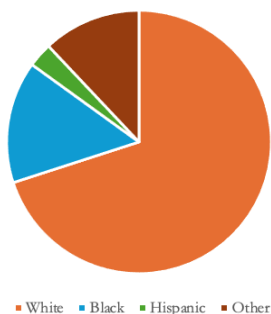
Advertising for events such as these must also be community-centered. Social media has the potential to reach target audiences, but a key theme of our research and recommendations has been meeting community members where they are. Engaging with the community requires thinking like the community. Using the existing relationship with OneLex, the police department should aim to advertise these events in person, as this will increase credibility within the community.

II. Area for Growth: Decreasing Gun Violence

Observations: Racial disparities are stark when it comes to gun violence within Lexington. While Black Lexingtonians comprise 15% of the city's population, nearly 63% of victims of firearm assault are Black Lexingtonians. This disparity is also evident among Hispanic Lexingtonians, who comprise 3% of the Lexington but 25% of the victims of assault with firearm shooting. Conversely,

white Lexingtonians (70%) make up only 12% of gun violence victims.^{78 79} These numbers are deeply troubling and indicate significant systemic inequalities. It is crucial to acknowledge that race itself *is not* an isolated factor regarding gun violence. Studies have demonstrated that white men raised in traditionally disadvantaged households (classified as poverty, unemployment, and single parent) are more likely to commit mass shootings than their white counterparts.⁸⁰

Racial Makeup of Lexington, Kentucky (2024)



Race and Assault by Firearm in Lexington (2022-24)



Existing Initiatives: In 2017, LFUCG invested in ONE Lexington (OneLex) after observing a rise in violent crime within the city. Led by Devine Carama, OneLex is an organization that coordinates government and community resources aiming to reduce gun violence among the city's youth.⁸¹ The program is a tremendous success; in 2023, the program recorded a record 46% decrease in homicides compared to the previous year.⁸² OneLex is modeled after Cure Violence, a national violence prevention organization that approaches gun violence from a public health standpoint. OneLex works to identify and mitigate the most significant areas of burden. For example, one notable accomplishment from the organization is Carama's *It Takes a Village* tutoring program, designed to provide academic and social support to underserved youth during the summer when youth violence

⁷⁸ City of Lexington, "Shooting Investigations," 2024, <https://www.lexingtonky.gov/shooting-investigations>.

⁷⁹ US Census Bureau, "Lexington-Fayette Urban County," 2024, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/lexingtonfayetteurbancountykentucky>.

⁸⁰ "Lexington-Fayette Urban County," US Census Bureau, 2024, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/lexingtonfayetteurbancountykentucky>.

⁸¹ "2023 End of Year Report," Lexington Kentucky Government, 2023, https://www.lexingtonky.gov/sites/default/files/2024-01/2023%20End-Of-Year%20Report%20EDIT_0.pdf.

⁸² Susan Straub, "ONE Lexington Releases Annual Report, Goals for New Year," City of Lexington, January 16, 2024, <https://www.lexingtonky.gov/news/01-16-2024/one-lexington-releases-annual-report-goals-new-year>.

experiences a significant uptick within the city. The program seeks to provide “positive alternatives” to violence and show youth that “life can be more than the current circumstances.”⁸³

Recommendation: Based on conversations with community members, it is evident that OneLex has had an immense effect on Lexington as it works to utilize community and government resources to fight existing disparities. From 2019 to 2023, firearm homicide rates reached annual record highs. Since 2023, however, the Lexington Police Department has observed a significant decline in rates of firearm homicide and assault. While this decline can be attributed to national trends regarding the end of the pandemic and decreasing firearm use, many government officials attribute this decline to the work of OneLex and their community partners.⁸⁴ By directing municipal funding towards OneLex, the program can work to strengthen, fund, and expand upon existing community partnerships that have proved invaluable in decreasing youth gun violence.

Recommendation: Ease of access to firearms is a critical risk factor regarding gun violence. Studies have consistently demonstrated that states with stricter gun laws have significantly lower rates of injury and death from firearm assault than states without.⁸⁵ Gun laws within Lexington reflect those of Kentucky: Lexington is a concealed carry city, which means that concealed possession of a weapon is legal for anyone above the age of 21, with or without a permit. The Kentucky state legislature prohibits any local government body from developing policies that regulate the sale of firearms and other weapons.⁸⁶ This poses a significant obstacle to preventing gun violence within Lexington. However, we recommend that Lexington develop, promote, and enforce strong standards for carrying concealed guns in public.

Improperly stored guns pose a significant community risk. Within Lexington, stolen guns

⁸³ “2023 End of Year Report,” Lexington Kentucky Government, 2023, https://www.lexingtonky.gov/sites/default/files/2024-01/2023%20End-Of-Year%20Report%20EDIT_0.pdf.

⁸⁴ Susan Straub, “ONE Lexington Releases Annual Report, Goals for New Year,” City of Lexington, January 16, 2024, <https://www.lexingtonky.gov/news/01-16-2024/one-lexington-releases-annual-report-goals-new-year>.

⁸⁵ Bellal, Joseph, “The Burden of Firearm Violence in the United States: Stricter Laws Result in Safer States,” *Journal of Injury and Violence Research* 10, no. 1 (January 10, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.5249/jivr.v10i1.951>.

⁸⁶ NRA-ILA and National Rifle Association, “Kentucky State Gun Laws and Regulations Explained,” NRA-ILA, accessed July 14, 2024, <https://www.nraila.org/gun-laws/state-gun-laws/kentucky/#::~text=control%20ordinances%20prohibited->.

represent a significant percentage of weapons used in assault.⁸⁷ National studies have indicated that gun thefts from cars are the leading source of firearm robberies used in crimes.⁸⁸ For these reasons, developing a deep community understanding of the risks involved in being a firearm owner is crucial to promoting public safety. Accountability needs to be promoted regarding firearm ownership. Even if a firearm owner does not intend to use the weapon for violent purposes, improper storage of firearms puts owners in a position of liability, particularly when these firearms are ultimately the source of an assault.

Studies have proven that the safe storage of firearms significantly reduces the risk of firearm assault.⁸⁹ We recommend that Lexington spearhead a city-wide campaign that promotes safe gun ownership. The campaign approach must be multifocal: advertisements located on billboards along prominent roadways such as New Circle Road and Man O' War Boulevard and along sources of public transportation are effective methods to start. Financial partnerships with local businesses could encourage the advertisement of gun safety methods. Moreover, partnerships with local community organizations, including faith organizations, that would allow memos and announcements regarding gun safety laws to be distributed at local organizations could prove highly effective. These advertisements can reflect those established by the National Crime Prevention Council. For these methods to be effective, they must be approached from a non-partisan perspective – emphasizing community values, such as “protecting our children” rather than using divisive language that may suggest a political stance on the issue. In addition, as part of a public health campaign, we recommend that the Lexington-Fayette government partner with organizations to subsidize or eliminate the cost of gun safety measures such as trigger locks, cable locks, lock boxes, and gun safes.

⁸⁷ Samantha Valentino, “How Stolen Guns Are Connected to Crime in Lexington,” <https://www.wkyt.com>, January 15, 2024, <https://www.wkyt.com/2024/01/15/how-stolen-guns-are-connected-crime-lexington/>.

⁸⁸ Jay Szkola, Megan J. O'Toole, and Sarah Burd-Sharps, “Gun Thefts from Cars: The Largest Source of Stolen Guns,” Everytown Research & Policy, May 9, 2024, <https://everytownresearch.org/report/gun-thefts-from-cars-the-largest-source-of-stolen-guns-2/>.

⁸⁹ Aliza Rosen, “How Safe and Secure Gun Storage Reduces Injury, Saves Lives | Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health,” Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, May 25, 2023, <https://publichealth.jhu.edu/2023/how-safe-and-secure-gun-storage-reduces-injury-saves-lives>.

III. Area for Growth: Expungement Clinics

Observations: Previous studies have demonstrated that, within Kentucky, Black defendants with misdemeanors are significantly more likely to be convicted than their white counterparts.⁹⁰ These convictions follow individuals on criminal records and severely restrict housing, education, and employment.⁹¹ These lifelong restrictions exacerbate existing cycles of inequity.⁹²

Existing Initiatives: Since 2022, the Lexington-Fayette County Government has held several expungement clinics based on an initial recommendation from the Office of Racial Equity.⁹³ Expungement offers individuals with non-violent felonies and misdemeanors the opportunity to have their criminal record cleared. In doing so, expungement promotes opportunities for personal and economic growth by mitigating the stigma around criminal conviction.⁹⁴ Because Black Americans with misdemeanor charges are convicted at a disproportionately higher rate than white Americans, expungement is a tool for equity to reestablish personal economic growth, autonomy, and the ability to live without stigma.⁹⁵ These efforts have been spearheaded by Mayor Linda Gorton and Equity and Implementation Officer Tiffany Brown in collaboration with several community partners. The clinics have proved highly effective; as of July 2024, the records of 1,147 Lexingtonians have been cleared.⁹⁶

Recommendations: Throughout our conversations with politicians and community members, we have observed the tremendous impact of local expungement clinics. Community members get a second chance, and the Lexington workforce expands. Limited data exists, however, to quantify this impact. Implementing a system of legal case management for recently expunged criminals would provide quantitative data surrounding the effectiveness of this process and help the city provide

⁹⁰ Equal Justice Initiative, “Research Finds Evidence of Racial Bias in Plea Deals,” Equal Justice Initiative, October 26, 2017, <https://eji.org/news/research-finds-racial-disparities-in-plea-deals/>.

⁹¹ Ja’Mea Thomas, “Clearing Your Record: The Benefits of Expungement,” Empower CDC, December 4, 2024, <https://empowercdc.org/news-events/newsroom.html/article/2023/12/04/clearing-your-record-the-benefits-of-criminal-record-expungement#:~:text=An%20Expungement%20and%20Record%20Clearing>.

⁹² Devah Pager, “The Mark of a Criminal Record,” *American Journal of Sociology* 108, no. 5 (2003).

⁹³ Beth Musgrave, “Have a Criminal Record but Need a Job? Lexington to Host Expungement Clinic,” Lexington Herald Leader, April 18, 2024, <https://www.kentucky.com/news/local/counties/fayette-county/article287802155.html>.

⁹⁴ Rebecca Vallas, Sharon Dietrich, and Beth Avery, “A Criminal Record Shouldn’t Be a Life Sentence to Poverty,” Center for American Progress, May 28, 2021, <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/criminal-record-shouldnt-life-sentence-poverty-2/>.

⁹⁵ Equal Justice Initiative, “Racial Bias in Plea Deals.”

⁹⁶ Musgrave, “Have a Criminal Record.”

targeted resources for supporting recently expunged individuals. This analysis will follow recently expunged individuals regarding changes in economic mobility, education attainment, and housing attainment. Quantifying these impacts would create a clearer picture of the tremendous impact expungement clinics offer the city of Lexington and open further opportunities for private and public funding to increase the efficacy of these practices.

Moreover, we recommend that the Lexington-Fayette County government increase funding for expungement clinics. Expungement clinics are driven by government-subsidized partnerships with legal professionals. The number of expungements that can occur, however, is resource-dependent. By increasing funding for expungement clinics, the Lexington-Fayette County government can expand the impact of this life-changing process.

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