



CRESTON HILLS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FOR
ADAPTIVE REUSE**

MARCH 2023

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Overview

The Neighborhood Alliance of Central Oklahoma (NACOK) was contacted by The Alliance for Economic Development of Oklahoma City on behalf of the Oklahoma City Urban Renewal Authority (OCURA), the current property owners, to help understand what community members thought about the future use of the currently abandoned Creston Hills Elementary School. The project involved creating a Tactical Team of community partners from Northeast Oklahoma City, all named at the end of this report, who played a crucial part in this project. NACOK allocated funding, through its contract with OCURA, to pay contracted partners for their time and materials, giving the volunteer groups and nonprofits funds for their coffers and efforts, while assuring that the needs of those who live in the community were heard.

The Tactical Team advised the community organizers from NACOK regarding strategy, planning, survey development, survey dissemination, and analysis of responses. Project activities by the partners included distribution of flyers, announcing community events, survey development, dissemination, and planning/hosting the reunion and community visioning events.

This project had four main phases:

1. Community meeting facilitated by NACOK staff where a brainstorming session was led by NACOK staff, Ashley Dickson Oso, and Sarah Lawhead **(14 Attended)**
2. Door-to-Door campaign where the NE side nonprofit, ReStore OKC, sent volunteers to 120 neighborhood doors to gather face-to-face surveys from residents and/or left a flyer with a QR Code for those who were not home. NACOK also purchased an email list for Creston Hills and within a 1-mile radius of the school building and sent email surveys with QR Codes to all. **(61 Surveys Completed)**
3. Creston Hills Elementary School Reunion, mainly organized and hosted by NEOKC Neighborhood Coalition, Inc., where attendees had an opportunity to gather, reminisce and fill out surveys regarding the future usage of the school. **(75 attended)**
4. Follow-up surveys were completed on three separate occasions among families visiting the nearby John F. Kennedy public park, located at NE 16th and MLK. **(11 Surveys Completed)**

Executive Summary

Significant Outcomes

The community shared ideas on how the redevelopment of the school building could benefit the South Creston Hills neighborhood. The most prevalent category based on potential reuse was Social Services with an emphasis on services that contribute to increase the health and wellness as well as increase food access and food services. Food access was also mentioned when prompted about the reuse of the school as a retail development, community members specifically mentioned grocery stores and restaurants.

When asked to elaborate on specific uses that would benefit the community, the most frequently mentioned was housing, with a priority for aging population and those experiencing housing insecurity.

Services and uses associated with Educational Services (examples: afterschool program, tutoring services and adult education program) and Cultural Services with a focus on the arts programs (examples: music, theater, dance) were also mentioned frequently throughout the outreach and engagement process.

Unwanted Elements

The question was also asked “What do you **not** want the school building to become?” Answers focused on not demolishing the original school building, developing the building into a use that might increase police presence (also mentioned favorably by others), and turning the building into a correctional facility of any kind.

Overall, the consensus from the community is the school is an important part of the South Creston Hills neighborhood. The community would like to see the reuse of the school contribute to the neighborhood's feeling of safety and security.

Note: Efforts to increase the feeling of safety and security associated with the school property are underway by OCURA. Since the community meeting and reunion, OCURA has removed three temporary metal buildings, which historically concealed unwanted activity on the property, as well as cleaned up the surrounding grounds to create a better transition with the abutting Creston Hills Park.

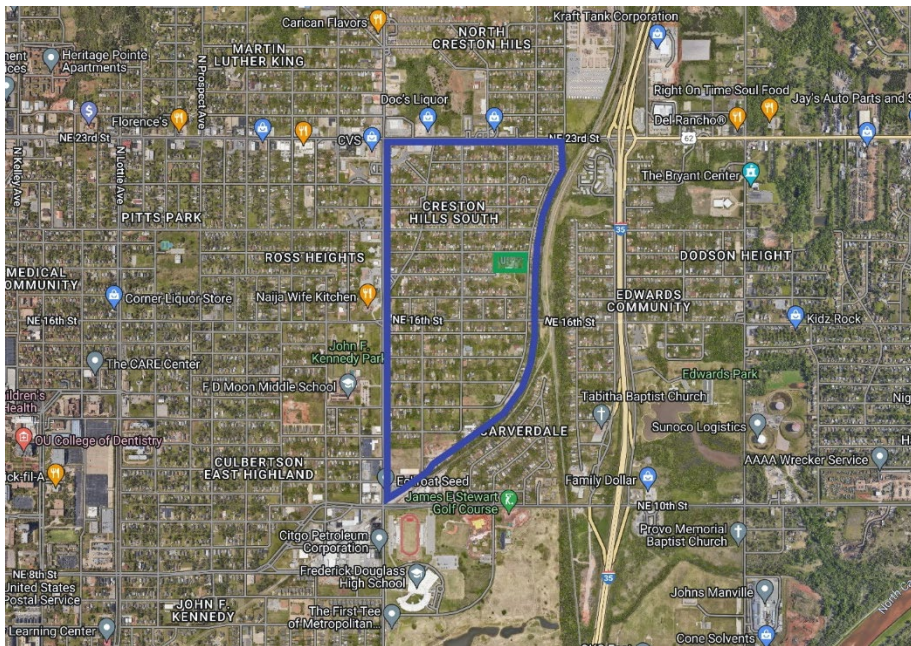
Next Steps

OCURA will use the information gathered in this report to help develop a Request for Proposal (RFP) for Creston Hills Elementary School. An RFP is a document that OCURA uses to outline the requirements for a project and to solicit formal proposals from developers for redevelopment projects. OCURA will release the RFP to the public for a proposal submission period of not less than 90 days for the assemblage and submission of proposals. Once the submission period ends and proposals are received, OCURA will evaluate the proposals based on the criteria within the RFP.

History

Creston Hills Neighborhood and School

Creston Hills Neighborhood was platted and developed in 1928 by John J. Harden. Creston Hills Elementary, located in the southeast corner of the neighborhood, was an elementary school built in 1934 with funding from the Public Works Administration. The school features Spanish Mission Revival architecture, with a stucco exterior and parapets, and is one of the three remaining Oklahoma City Public School buildings in this style. Because of its unique architectural design, the school has been identified as potentially eligible for listing on the National Register. The school property abuts City of Oklahoma City public park land, Creston Hills Park, to the south. Creston Hills Elementary was eventually closed as part of [MAPS for Kids](#). In 2003, John Wesley Charter School moved into the building but was forced to close in 2007 after it was unable to make AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress) for 4 years. The building has remained vacant since and is in great need of revitalization. In August 2018, Oklahoma City Public Schools transferred the school property to the City of Oklahoma City. In September 2021, OCURA entered into an agreement with the City of Oklahoma City to help facilitate redevelopment of the property. OCURA took ownership of the property in December of 2021 and entered into a contract with NACOK in January 2021 to provide community engagement services.



South Creston Hills & White Orchard Neighborhood Map with Creston Hills School

Neighborhood Association

The South Creston Hills Neighborhood Association was established in the 1950's. Effie Grimes was the long-time President and served from the 1980's through her death in the early 2000's. The Black Chronicle showed that Ms. Grimes was awarded Neighbor of the Year at the Northeast Neighborhood Assembly hosted by the Urban League in 1979. Today, in 2022, there is a lay leader working to try to bring neighbors closer together and having some success. For more information regarding the South Creston Hills Neighborhood Association, contact NACOK at Georgie@nacok.org or (405) 528-6322.

Engagement

Community Meeting

On June 7, 2022, the Neighborhood Alliance hosted a community meeting with Creston Hills residents and community partners. Fourteen attendees shared their thoughts about the neighborhood challenges and opportunities for restoring the former Creston Hills Elementary School building. The meeting format deployed a nominal group technique designed to build consensus around specific topics.



"I've lived in this neighborhood for 52 years and cannot wait to see this building come to life again."-Ms. Ernestine Johnson, neighbor.

During the meeting, the attendees discussed the current issues with the school property being vacant. The attendees expressed the impacts of the property causing safety and security issues for the surrounding community. The vacant property inviting illegal activity (crime, drug use, vandalism) and the lack of lighting were identified as a few of the key issues with the property.

As the exercise continued, attendees opened to conversation regarding what are the undesired uses of the property. The group identified the property being redeveloped into Apartments as the least favorable result. Other undesired uses/reuses of the property were identified as: Retail, Homeless Shelter, Juvenile Detention Center and for it to remain abandon.

As the meeting continued, a discussion framed around the types of services and uses of the property were discussed. The categories discussed were: Social Services, Housing Services, Educational Services, Retail, Office Space and Crime Prevention/Children's Services. After the discussion concluded, the most favorable use was for Senior Housing, followed by Social Services, Education Services, Cultural Services and Office Space. The least favorable were identified was a use that would increase Police Presence as a Retail Use due to increasing the traffic throughout the community.

Community Meeting Data

The tables below break down the themes that emerged from the community meeting.

Table 1: Current Issues with the Property	Mentions
Lighting	2
Housing Insecurity/Homeless	2
Dump debris on vacant lot	1
Vandalism	1
Drug Use	1
Crime	1
Property not secure	1
Abandon Property	1

Table 2: Uses and Services that are Not Wanted	Mentions
Apartments	3
Retail	1
Homeless Shelter	1
Juvenile Detention Center	1
Abandon Property	1

Table 3.1 – Social Services	Preferred	Not Preferred
Social Services	4	
Senior Program/Meals	2	
Wellness Clinic/Center	2	
Computer Lab	1	
Exercise Room	1	
Community Kitchen	1	
Interactive with Parks and Trails	1	
Community Interaction	1	
Health Services	1	
Community Center w/ Resources	1	
Homeless Shelter		1
Apartments		1

Table 3.2 – Housing Services	Preferred	Not Preferred
Senior Apartments	7	
Homeless be Independent	1	
Helping people with avenues to better living	1	
Apartments		1
Not helping to resolve issues that lead to poverty		1

Table 3.3 – Educational Services	Preferred	Not Preferred
Education Services	3	
After School Programs	1	

Table 3.4 – Cultural Services	Preferred	Not Preferred
Cultural Services	3	
Movie Studio	2	
Music	1	
Museum	1	
Fitness for kids	1	
Stage Pavilion	1	
Community Cultural Kitchen	1	

Table 3.5 – Retail	Preferred	Not Preferred
Retail - Traffic		2

Table 3.6 – Office Space	Preferred	Not Preferred
Office - Assist families office space	3	1
Non-Profit Organization	2	
Community Meeting Space	1	

Table 3.7 – Crime Prevention/Children’s Services	Preferred	Not Preferred
Violence Interruption	2	1
Neighborhood Meeting Space	1	
Community Interaction	1	1
Police		2
Bringing in the criminal elements		1

Survey

Survey participants were contacted in one of four ways:

1. Restore OKC, a contract partner with NACOK on this project, went door-to-door in the two Creston Hills neighborhoods (North and South Creston Hills) conducting face-to-face interviews. Face-to-face interviews were also conducted in the Ralph Ellison Library.
2. A QR code was available at the reunion to encourage people to take the survey.
3. Neighborhood Alliance purchased an email list for the Creston Hills neighborhood boundaries and a one-mile radius surrounding the school to deliver email surveys with a QR code.
4. Families were surveyed as they were visiting the nearby JFK Park.

Survey Volunteers

NACOK recruited Diettra Edwards of Restore OKC to serve as the project lead for the door-to-door surveys, yielding invaluable information. Many Northeast OKC residents are hesitant to participate in community engagement efforts, stating a distrust of past urban renewal practices. Many in this neighborhood continue to feel ignored by people in power. This created a challenge in collecting significant feedback. Another challenge outside of anyone's control was the unseasonable hot weather, which was a factor for volunteers trying to go door-to-door. Surveys were also conducted by NACOK staff at the JFK Park on 3 separate occasions in late 2022.

Survey Data

We received a total of 72 responses to the survey sent out regarding the future of the Creston Hills School. Exhibit A provides a copy of the survey questions. Participants were asked to define their relationship with the school property and the South Creston Hills community. Participants were able to select items from the list below:

1. I attended Creston Hills Elementary School
2. I live in Creston Hills Neighborhood
3. I used to live in Creston Hills Neighborhood
4. I live in a neighborhood near Creston Hills
5. I worked at Creston Hills Elementary School
6. I visit Creston Hills Park
7. Other: (fill in blank)

Table 4: Relationship with Property and Neighborhood	Count
I live in Creston Hills Neighborhood	22
I live in a neighborhood near Creston Hills	21
I attended Creston Hills Elementary School	10
Other (Community Member, Work in the Area, etc.)	9
I used to live in Creston Hills Neighborhood	8
I worked at Creston Hills Elementary School	1
I visit Creston Hills Park	1

After identifying their relationship to the school and community, Participants identified amenities that, if located in the neighborhood, would increase their quality of life.

Table 5: Desired Neighborhood Amenities	Mentions
Grocery Store	6
Park	5
Community/Recreation Center	5
Youth Programs	4
Adult Education Programs	3
Gas Station	2
Afterschool Program	2
Apartments	1
Beautification	1
Business Incubator	1
Coffee Shop	1
Community Action Agency	1
Computer Lab	1
Day Shelter	1
Elementary School	1
Event Center	1
Gym	1
Health Services	1
Larger Library	1
Outdoor Recreation	1
People	1
School	1
Social Services	1
Transportation Hub/Outlet	1

Survey participants were able to select multiple votes for seven (7) categories that tailored to their needs:

1. Social Services
2. Cultural Services
3. Educational Services
4. Housing Services
5. Retail
6. Office Spaces
7. Other Uses

Table 6: Votes and Summaries of Categories of Service or Use		
Category of Service or Use	Votes	Summary of Findings
Social Services	34	Rehabilitative Services, Wellness Centers, and Food Services were the most desired social services. Food Services might comprise of food distribution centers, community kitchens, and meals for the homeless. Wellness centers would focus on gyms, workout classes, and walking trails.
Cultural Services	30	The most common cultural services revolved around Music, Youth Programs, Dance Studios, and Theatre.
Educational Services	30	Tutoring and After-School Programs, Reopening the School, and Adult Education programs were the most common goals for educational services.
Housing Services	26	Senior Housing, Homeless Shelters, and Housing Assistance Services were the most commonly desired housing services.
Retail	16	Overall, there was a demand for a variety of retail that highlighted the community. There was a focus on retail stores that can provide Local Goods, as well as a Grocery Store, Coffee Shop, and a Food Pantry.
Office Spaces	8	For Office Spaces, the community wants low-cost spaces for startup businesses and a focus on businesses that reinvested in the community.
Other Uses	7	Along with the other services listed above, the community desires more attention and funding from the city to help everyone in the community to address many different needs.

For each category, the survey participants were encouraged to further detail and elaborate on their choices by voicing specific services and uses for each category. Residents could provide multiple responses for each category, for example, a person could respond that social services, food services, and wellness centers are a priority need.

Table 7.1 – Social Services	
Health and Rehabilitative Services	10
Wellness Center	9
Food Services	8
Senior Services	3
Financial Planning	3
Computer Lab	3
Employment Services	2
Library Services	2

Table 7.2 – Cultural Services	
Youth Programs	9
Music	7
Dance Studio	6
Community Gathering Space	6
Theatre	5
Art Classes/ Displays	4
History Center	3
Guest Speakers	1
Genealogy Services	1

Table 7.3 – Educational Services	
Tutoring/ After School Programs	10
Reopen School	10
Adult Education Programs	7
Job Training	4
Computer Lab	3
GED	2
University Extension	1

Table 7.4 – Housing Services	
Senior Housing	14
Homeless Shelter/ Services	8
Housing Assistance/ Services	5
Affordable Housing	5
Single Parent/ Children Housing	3
Section 8 Housing	2

Table 7.5 – Retail	
Local Goods	5
Grocery Store/ Restaurant	5
Coffee Shop	5
Food Pantry	2
Salon	1
Black Owned Business	1

Table 7.6 – Office Spaces	
Business that Invests in the Community	4
Low Cost Start Up	2
Kids Learning Space	2
Mini Police Station	2
Nutrition Shop	1
Local Retail	1
Information Hub	1

Table 7.7 – Other Services	
General Assistance	3
Community Gathering Space	1
Gym	1
Youth Programs	1
Under School Age Child Programs	1

Participants were also asked what types of uses and services they did not want for the former school building. It was a common desire that the school not be torn down as it played an integral role in their community and history. **Table 8** represents the inputs from the participants.

Table 8: Uses and Services that are Not Wanted by the Community	Mentions
Demolish School	10
Police/ Jail	6
Homeless Shelter	4
Housing for Formerly Incarcerated	2
Abandoned Building	1
Daycare	1
Church	1
Bank	1
Public School	1
Plasma Center	1
Liquor Store	1
Residential Accommodation	1

Creston Hills All-Class School Reunion

Who would be better to give input on the reuse of the school than those that attended the school in the past? The NEOKC Neighborhood Coalition, a coalition made up of sixteen northeast Neighborhood Associations, along with NACOK, planned and implemented an all-class Creston Hills Elementary School reunion.

The reunion was held on June 11, 2022, in Creston Hills Park. The reunion was a great overall success, attended by approximately 75 past school attendees, neighborhood residents, dignitaries, and nearby community members. Oklahoma City Public School Superintendent Dr. Sean McDaniel spoke, northeast OKC's own Sisters in Motion performed, a local favorite food truck provided free food for attendees (paid through the contract with NACOK), and a bouncy house and a DJ were available for all to enjoy. All of this made possible by the 19 volunteers.

The OKC-County Health Department had a booth set up providing simple health checks and fun games. Everyone who attended had a dialogue and has the opportunity to fill out the survey about the future of the school building.

Unfortunately, it was unseasonably hot, with the temperature well over 100 degrees and scarce shade; however, those that attended enjoyed themselves.

Opportunities

NACOK allocated funding in its contract with OCURA to hire and pay three Northeast OKC volunteer groups and/or non-profits to assist in the creation and delivery of this project. It was important to compensate them for their time and efforts in their valuable community work.

A Tactical Committee was formed consisting of 9 individuals. Additionally, 15 community members/groups were consulted. It was important to get NE OKC groups' input on this engagement opportunity within their community. The outreach opportunity while working on this project will prove valuable in building relationships within South Creston Hills and across Northeast OKC. (See a complete list of partners at the end of this report.)

LaShawn Martin, former President of South Creston Hills Neighborhood Association, worked with NACOK Community Organizers and was instrumental for outreach. She created a podcast titled "Pods of Love" specifically to help spread the word about this project.

Denyvetta Davis, President of the NEOKC Neighborhood Coalition, has reached out to LaShawn and other South Creston Hills neighbors and is offering the Coalition's support to help in re-organizing efforts, should the neighborhood be interested.

In preparation for the reunion, the Tactical Committee worked alongside NACOK to contact the City of Oklahoma City's Parks Department to improve the conditions of the adjoining park from overgrown vegetation, litter, and debris. The Parks Department Business Manager, Michael Smith, was receptive of the concerns for the park and immediately sent a crew to address those concerns. Neighbors were educated on how to stay in touch with the Parks Department or how to submit concerns to the City's Action Center should the park once again need attention.

Challenges

Outreach to the South Creston Hills neighborhood presented challenges because the neighborhood association is inactive. NACOK worked with some of the former neighborhood leaders, although it was challenging to accommodate busy schedules and to overcome the lack of trust for outside entities within their neighborhood. As such, NACOK reached out to other Northeast OKC groups to help with the planning and implementation. NACOK knew it was important to have NE residents very involved in this project. The momentum was slow to build for this project, ultimately all groups and neighbors worked together for the community engagement and creating a school reunion.

Acknowledgements

Tactical Committee Members

Denyvetta Davis
Northeast Neighborhood Coalition*

Rita Freeny
Sisters in Motion*, a NE Side group of women

Lashawn Martin
Creston Hills Neighborhood Leadership Team

Joyce Jackson
Garden Council of Neighborhoods Association
President

Dietra Edwards
Restore OKC*, NE OKC Non-Profit

Latricia Williams
NED OKC Community Member At-Large

Sarah Lawhead
Neighborhood Alliance of Central Oklahoma

Ashley Dickson
Neighborhood Alliance of Central Oklahoma

Georgie Rasco
Neighborhood Alliance of Central Oklahoma

Community Members/Groups Engaged

Ward 7 Council Person - Nikki Nice

South Creston Hills Residents

North Creston Hills Residents

JFK Park users (informal group)

Black Alumni Association

BlackSpace Oklahoma

OU School of Architecture and Planning

OKCPS Superintendent Dr. Sean McDaniel

OKCPS District 5 Board Member Adrian Anderson

Oklahoma State Senator George Young

Representative Jason Lowe

Representative A.J. Pittman

Oklahoma City/County Health Department

White Orchard Neighborhood

North Creston Hills Neighborhood

*Indicates groups that were provided compensation

Exhibit A: Survey Questions

Creston Hills Elementary School Project

We are gathering community input from neighbors and alumni to help determine the future of Creston Hills Elementary School building. The survey will take approximately 4 minutes to complete. If you'd like some ideas on what repurposed old buildings can become, consider first checking out this webpage <https://www.useful-community-development.org/adaptive-reuse.html>.

1. What is your relationship to Creston Hills? Multiple choice. **Please highlight, underline, or circle your answer.**
 - I attended Creston Hills Elementary School
 - I live in Creston Hills Neighborhood
 - I used to live in Creston Hills Neighborhood
 - I live in a neighborhood near Creston Hills
 - I worked at Creston Hills Elementary School
 - I visit Creston Hills Park
 - Other: _____
2. If you answered you live in a neighborhood near Creston Hills, what neighborhood do you currently live in? Single choice. **Please highlight, underline, or circle your answer.**
 - North Creston Hills (boundaries Miramar, NE 30, NE 23, MLK Blvd)
 - Carverdale (Boundaries Katy RR, NE 16, NE 10, Bellevidere)
 - Ross Heights (MLK Blvd, NE 23, NE 16, Prospect)
 - Other: _____
3. If you attended or worked at Creston Hills Elementary School, when did you attend/work there? You may approximate if you're not sure.

Community Feedback

In this section, we ask a series of questions aimed at understanding your preferences regarding the future use of the Creston Hills Elementary School building.

4. Name 2-3 amenities that, if located in your neighborhood, would increase your quality of life. Multi Line Text.

5. What kinds of programming would you like to see occur in the building? (check all that apply) Multiple choice. **Please highlight, underline, or circle your answer(s).**

- Cultural services** are services aimed at satisfying cultural interests or needs. They do not represent cultural material goods in themselves but facilitate their production and distribution. For example, cultural services include licensing activities and other copyright-related services, audio-visual distribution activities, promotion of performing arts and cultural events, as well as cultural information services and the preservation of books, recordings, and artefacts (in libraries, documentation centers, museums). **Examples: pavilion/stage (music in the park), music theatre production, art/dance studio, or community "cultural" kitchen.**
- Social services** are services that improve social welfare for people in need that will improve the standard of living for all people. **Examples: business incubator, day room for seniors, computer lab/study hall, exercise facility, kitchen for prep/distribution of community meals, wellness clinic, athletic facilities**
- Educational services** provide instruction and training in a wide variety of subjects. This instruction and training are provided by specialized establishments, such as schools, colleges, universities, and training centers. **Examples: community schools (Community Schools are public schools that provide services and support that fit each neighborhood's needs, created, and run by the community —whether it's free healthy meals, health care, tutoring, mental health counseling, or other tailored services before, during, and after school), job training, university extensions, business incubator, social entrepreneurship incubator**
- Housing services** are activities designed to assist individuals or families in locating, obtaining, or retaining suitable housing. **Examples: senior-living apartments, service-enriched housing (permanent, basic rental housing in which social services are available onsite or by referral through a supportive services program or service coordinator), mixed-use apartment and commercial space**
- Office spaces** are rooms in a building that provide a suitable environment for office operations. **Examples: governmental agency reuse, firm building**
- Retail** is the sale of goods to the public in relatively small quantities for use or consumption rather than for resale. **Examples: coffee shop, mixed-use salon spaces private, fully equipped, luxury salon suites of varying sizes)**
- Other uses** **Examples: mixed-use commercial building with a gallery, an event space, offices, and a conference room, urban farming**

6. Please describe the types of **cultural services** that you would like to see in the Creston Hills school building from **Question 5, if applicable.**

7. Please describe the types of **social services** that you would like to see in the Creston Hills school building from **Question 5, if applicable.**

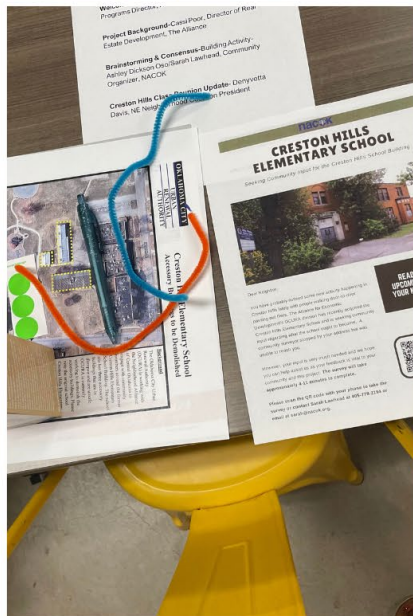
8. Please describe the types of **educational services** that you would like to see in the Creston Hills school building from **Question 5, if applicable.**

9. Please describe the types of **housing services** that you would like to see in the Creston Hills school building from **Question 5, if applicable**.
10. Please describe the types of **office spaces** that you would like to see in the Creston Hills school building from **Question 5, if applicable**.
11. Please describe the types of **retail spaces** that you would like to see in the Creston Hills school building from **Question 5, if applicable**.
12. Please describe the types of **other uses** that you would like to see in the Creston Hills school building from **Question 5, if applicable**.
13. What do you absolutely **NOT** want the former school building, Creston Hills Elementary School, to become?
14. Is there anything else you'd like to add regarding this project or survey? Your feedback is always appreciated!

Exhibit B: Photos



Creston Hills Community Meeting





Creston Hills Class Reunion





*Construction Photograph of Creston Hills Elementary School used for a story in the Oklahoma Times newspaper. Caption: "Construction financed by P W A"
Oklahoma Times, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, January 26, 1934*



*Construction photograph used for a story in the Oklahoma Times newspaper. Caption: "Construction work on the \$93,121 addition to Creston Hills school, 2240 NE 19, provides additional playtime interest for pupils during recreation periods, as masons raise the addition on the west side of the old building."
Oklahoma Times, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, April 5, 1949*



Photograph used for a story in the Oklahoma Times newspaper. Caption: "A "new look" to an old building is the case of Creston Hills, which now has five-room addition and new parking lot." Oklahoma Times, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, August 13, 1959



Photograph used for a story in the Oklahoma Times newspaper. Caption: "Approximately 350 students at Creston Hills elementary school, 2240 NE 19, had a real evacuation drill Friday morning, but many just thought it was all in practice." Oklahoma Times, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, April 17, 1953



Photograph used for a story in the Oklahoma Times newspaper. Caption: "Integration at Creston Hills elementary school brought a decision to have a visiting counselor of each race" Oklahoma Times, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, August 30, 1955



Photograph donated to the Metropolitan Library System from Oklahoma City Public Schools. Aerial Photo Looking South at Creston Hills School. Oklahoma City Public Schools, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, 1946