

Maria Gurren

Emily Skinner: This is Emily Skinner interviewing Maria Gurren. It's April 4, 2022. And we're at her house in the Shelby Park neighborhood in Louisville, Kentucky. So what brought you to Shelby Park?

Maria: So I moved here about six years ago, and I had lived in Schnitzelburg prior to this on Lydia Street. So I only moved about six blocks. And I kind of been looking at houses. I'd been renting. I hadn't owned a house before. And I've been looking at houses for a long time online. And I mean, for like two years, I'd probably been looking on and off for houses. And I started to get serious about looking at houses, and I found this house and it was actually the first and only house that I walked through. Yeah. I found this house I wanted. My aunt was my realtor. So my aunt, my cousin and I came and walked through. And we probably spent about 45 minutes walking around this house and she just kept saying, I know this is your first one but this is a really good house. I wasn't super familiar with the neighborhood before I moved here. I was familiar with the general area and I knew I wanted to be close to downtown, be close to the Highlands, be just kind of like in the mix of where everything is kind of in the urban core. But I didn't really start learning more about Shelby Park until I moved here. It really started with just knowing the area I wanted, and then falling in love with the house and then everything else kind of came after that.

(01:33)

Emily: All right. Where did live growing up?

Maria: So I grew up in Northern Kentucky in Fort Thomas, Kentucky. I lived there until I was 18 and then I moved to Louisville to go to the University of Louisville. I was came here for undergrad. I took a year off and worked for a while. And I went to the University of Louisville for grad school and just kind of fell in love with the city and have been here ever since.

Emily: Oh, cool. What did you study?

Maria: I studied psychology in undergrad, and then I got my masters in social work.

Emily: So I mean, you touched on this a little bit like what was your impression of the neighborhood when you first moved in? Or as you were kind of like getting to know it I guess.

(02:16)

Maria: Yeah. So you know, when I looked at the house, I could immediately see the park, because my backyard butts up to the park and so that was a huge selling point. I loved all the big beautiful trees and just having that green space so close. Didn't have a dog yet, but knew there would probably be a dog in my future. So I was also thinking about that. I really quickly kind of felt a sense of community, you know. I had never lived somewhere where I knew so many of my

Maria Gurren

neighbors like on my block and on my street and the streets around me. I went to a neighborhood association meeting pretty early on because I was looking for, you know, what kind of community groups were in the area and went to my first neighborhood association meeting, and then have been involved ever since. I think the beautiful park, the green space, the sense of community, neighbors sitting out on their porches and talking to one another and, you know, people walking by and introducing themselves and just that sense of community and neighbors wanting to know who lives around them and being invested in the place that, that we all live.

(03:27)

Emily: Yeah. All right. How would you define the boundaries of Shelby Park? Because I mean, you know, you lived nearby and so, and you weren't like that familiar with the neighborhood. And so just like kind of like in your mind like, where it kind of ends and begins.

Maria: Yeah, so on the northern end, it's Kentucky Street, so Kentucky splits Shelby Park and Smoketown. So the north side of Kentucky Street is Smoketown and then the south side of Kentucky Street is us. And then Bergman on the south end, Logan Street. I'm like facing the opposite way. Logan Street on the east end and then Preston on the west are kind of like the official boundaries. But yeah, we're really like nestled here in between Smoketown, Old Louisville, Germantown and then kind of the railroad tracks to the, to the south of us, and then the Merriwether neighborhood to the south of us in Schnitzelburg, so, yeah, kind of a little hidden gem.

(04:31)

Emily: What would you say like some of the key physical features of the neighborhood are?

Maria: The age of the homes and the historic homes are huge. I think that you know, we're in a... my house was built in 1900, shotgun style house. And I grew up in an old house so that's something that like I've always kind of identified with, and it was a big selling point for when I looked at this house is having like the original hardwood floors and having the fireplace and the big windows and the high ceilings. I think the architecture of the homes is definitely one of the physical attributes of the neighborhood that really sticks out. And then the park is huge, you know, it's right in the center of our neighborhood and it's really a gathering place and we have these giant old oak trees and the Carnegie Library that is our community center now. And just all of the everything that the park offers. You know, people can be there for cookouts and events and parties at the shelter and tennis and basketball. And we've seen arborists in the park practicing like going up in trees. And you know, it's like every year I feel like, you know, as it gets warmer, and throughout the spring, the summer, and the fall that you know, I see more stuff happening in the park. So that's definitely one of the physical attributes of the neighborhood. I feel like it's our signature thing.

(06:00)

Emily: So like the historic architecture, the homes. Anything else like kind of architecturally stand out to you?

Maria Gurren

Maria: I think how close the homes are together is definitely something that facilitates more of that connection and conversation, because you are so close, you know. I can sit on my porch and have a conversation with my neighbors sitting on their porch, and we don't have to, like move or, you know, like, we're just right there. I think you know, some of our other kind of the historical businesses that have been here and like the history behind all of that, and like the Levi Factory, and you know, all of that kind of stuff. I've been able to go in some of those buildings or the, the building had its Head First Media now, but on the corner of St. Catherine and Shelby, that's like a gorgeous old church, that the back end is a recording studio, but the front of it is still beautiful stained glass windows and just giant, you know, ceilings and all of the all of the detail that's in there are just some of the kind of buildings that stick out to me.

(07:17)

Emily: Yeah. Um, what about kind of like major institutions or even like prominent businesses stands out to you?

Maria: So, you know, it's interesting, the, the increase in businesses in this neighborhood in the almost six years that I've been here has been, it's been so quick, it's been like, very drastic. You know, I've seen a lot of change in the time that I've lived here, because when I first moved in, you know, I couldn't walk to any bars or restaurants. And now, you know, you can do a lot without leaving Shelby Park. You know, you can go to Trouble Bar and Toasty's and Square Cut Pizza, and you can get ice cream, and like all these things that weren't there before. So those are some of like the newer businesses that I think have really contributed to more people coming to our neighborhood, and to residents of the neighborhood being able to do more without leaving Shelby Park and do more in walking distance and biking distance.

(08:16)

I think that we're lucky to have several great nonprofits that provide really important services in our neighborhood. You know, St. Vincent DePaul has an incredibly rich history and has been around for a very long time. And, you know, they are a great partner and a great resource and asset to have in our neighborhood, and all the services they provide from housing and family enrichment, and, you know, serving meals to folks who may be unhoused, or just, you know, dealing with food instability. And then the same with Unity House, which is run by Volunteers of America that's in our neighborhood over on Preston. And they're actually the only family shelter in the city where an entire family can stay together if they need housing, rather than being split up with like, you know, moms and kids going one place and you know, dads going another place, like a whole family can stay together. I volunteer there and they really do a whole lot. And folks are allowed to stay there for a decent amount of time to try to really have a chance to build and get back on their feet and you know, get stable housing and employment and all of those things. And then House of Ruth is another and that's an architectural gem that I miss. But House of Ruth is another nonprofit. So they serve individuals and families who are impacted by HIV and AIDS. And they've been an amazing partner in terms of like letting us use their meeting space and they have some really exciting, affordable project, or affordable housing projects that we've been able to support in the past and supporting in the future and building new units in the neighborhood.

Maria Gurren

And so I think that our nonprofits are really an asset to our neighborhood.

(10:03)

And, you know, our proximity to downtown means that, you know, we are an accessible neighborhood for a lot of people to get to, as well as the, you know, a lot of those services being happening, serving people who already live in that neighborhood. You know, I think historically, this has been a very, like economically diverse and racially diverse neighborhood for, for a long time. And for people not to have to leave the neighborhood to get certain services that they need is, I think, crucial. And then I'd say most recently, the little vegan jerky company has moved in. There was kind of a journey with that, at first. We weren't too sure about them. It required a zoning change that we were really worried about, because it had to be zoned industrial. And so that's kind of the opposite direction of what we've been going in as a neighborhood in terms of developing more residential and commercial, you know, we're, historically there's been a lot of industry, and especially at the south of our neighborhood there still is. But, you know, we had a chance to meet them and work with them, and they really have been dedicated to being a good neighbor. And so they did some things throughout the zoning process that protected us should they ever leave, you know. There were a lot of things that were required, or I shouldn't say required. There were a lot of things that were allowed in their zoning that they didn't need to use, you know, especially being a vegan production facility, you know. They're not going to be frying things; they're not going to have animal products, all that kind of stuff, things that can be like smelly to the neighborhood, you know, and so they made sure that those were binded out of their zoning, so that if they ever left, we couldn't end up with, you know, somebody who made dog food there. No offense, Charlie, I know you need to eat too, but, um. And so developing a community benefits agreement with them that includes hiring from within the neighborhood. You know, they're helping us bring fresh food to the neighborhood through a partnership with New Roots where they're gonna serve as a distribution site for New Roots. And, you know, all kinds of things. Charlie's going to be all over the audio of his little sighs over here. They're going to have, create a special Shelby Park bag, a jerky bag, like a special release.

Emily: Oh, cool.

Maria: And donate up to \$10,000 for the sales of that bag to the neighborhood association.

Emily: Nice.

Maria: So we've gotten to help and we haven't gotten to flavors yet, but we've gotten to help with some of the bag design and just little kind of things from the neighborhood that are like symbols and signifiers to us that maybe someone else wouldn't know. But we would recognize and so that's been really fun.

Emily: Yeah. And so you've mentioned like, partners and partnerships, to clarify, with the neighborhood associations.

Maria: Yes, with the neighborhood association. Yeah.

Maria Gurren

Emily: Yeah. Okay. So, let's talk about you know, a little bit about the people who live in Shelby Park, like, tell me about your neighbors and like, you know, who lives here?

(13:09)

Maria: Yeah. So, Jim and Deb live right next door, and they actually run the community garden over on St. Catherine Street. And so they're like some of the best neighbors that you could ask for as my next door neighbors. In the summer when we're growing food and harvesting stuff, you know, sometimes I'll just come home and there's a bag of kale on my porch with a little note, you know, enjoy. And then I'll you know, if my squash did well, one year then I'll give them my squash and you know, that kind of thing. So they also sit out on their porch and play music. So Jim is a musician and Deb sings and also does some voice acting, but sometimes they'll be on their porch especially during the pandemic we did kind of front porch Fridays and they would come out and Jim would play music, and they were both sing and they'd have their phone set up on Facebook so that anyone on Facebook Live all across the country their friends could watch them. Yeah, so they're just they're just great and like I said, they run the community garden over on St. Catherine Street and do a lot to keep that moving. I'm always asking them questions about growing food and herbs and veggies and tips and stuff because they've been at it a lot longer than I have, and have given me tips about you know what to put in my compost bin and you know, I'll take care of it. I'll go over and check on their cat when they go out of town and things like that. So they're right next door neighbors. And then there's several families with young kids at the end of the street, which is great and you know, they'll go on walks and walk by the house and they all know Charlie and say hi to the dog when they come by, and you know, we'll stop and chit chat. And then you've talked with Miss Ames. She lives down at the corner of Camp and Jackson. I actually knew her before moving to the neighborhood. And I told her that I lived close to Shelby Park. And I told her where I lived. And she said, well, that's not Shelby Park. So she was very excited when I moved here. I worked with her when she was a school counselor at JCPS. And we had some clients in common and got to know her and just kind of instantly loved her. She's absolutely hilarious. Yeah, she's lived in the neighborhood for decades. She has so much knowledge about the people and the places here. And it's really essential to have that kind of historical knowledge, especially as our neighborhood is growing and changing. We always want to be mindful of where we've been and how that informs where we're going. And yeah, so she, she knows everybody. You know, I'll bring something... I'll say somebody's name, she'll be like, well, you know who their dad is. And then I'll get like the whole story. She'll call me sometimes about to talk about neighborhood association things. And we'll be on the phone for 45 minutes or an hour. And I'll walk Charlie down there sometimes and visit when the weather's nice, and we just sit on the front porch and hang out. But yeah so many people who are involved with the neighborhood association. Whether they're like the regular folks who are, you know, like on the board or come to meetings all the time, or people who show up for different things. We had a work day in our newest community garden over on Preston Street on Saturday, and we had 10 people show up on a cold, cloudy Saturday to come spread mulch and clear out invasive species and plant seeds. And you know, Sarah Wolf is in the neighborhood. And she also works for Olmsted parks. And so she's really helped us get programming in the park and activate that space and kind of advocate for Shelby Park among all the Olmsted parks. I know you've talked to Chip. Chip is like Mr. Shelby Park. He knows so much history. He's so in love with this place. And, you know, he really pulled me into the neighborhood association after I moved here. And there's

Maria Gurren

so many people that he has met and gotten connected, and then who have stayed involved. So he's like, he's like our neighborhood association recruitment officer. I think he's probably the enthusiasm officer. I've gone with him and helped give tours to folks who want to learn more about the neighborhood. And as many times as we've done that, I always hear something new.

(17:37)

Emily: Um, so you said that you kind of got involved with SPNA like right away. But um, you know, so when about did you get involved? And like, who I think like, who were like the kind of like main folks over there that kind of were running things?

Maria: Yeah. So I got involved. I moved here in August of 2016 and I got involved right away. I don't remember when my first meeting was, but it was sometime that fall. And I remember the meetings moved very quickly and there's tons of items on the agenda and they're just going through all this stuff. And I'm brand new, like I have no frame of reference. I don't know what they're talking about. I actually thought at one point, I was like, maybe this is not the meeting I'm supposed to be at because like, they're clearly like, talking about a ton of stuff that I know nothing about, you know. And, and then I kind of started talking to people and Chip especially just about everything that was going on. And he immediately was like, do you want to be on the board? Do you want to do a project? You know, trying to get me involved. And so through that I really just learned a lot about all the different efforts that the Neighborhood Association had going on at the time, and kind of figured out where, where I fit into that. And, and then yeah, I was on the Association for a couple years and then became vice president while Chip was still president. And then when Chip stepped down. I became president a few years ago. Just trying to keep a lot of that work going, you know, we've always had a lot. We're a very active neighborhood association and I think we've always had a lot going on and trying to keep all those balls in the air and keep everything moving. And then you know, partner with new people who come into the neighborhood. And right now we're planning a door to door kind of canvassing effort to let folks know about the neighborhood association, and gain feedback from people about what they want to see in the neighborhood, whether or not they want to be involved in the neighborhood association, we just want to hear more voices and more diverse voices. As long as we've been around, you know, currently, we aren't a group that's super representative of the neighborhood in terms of, you know, we're mostly young white homeowners, and this neighborhood is very diverse in terms of economic background and renter homeowner status, and age, and race and gender and sexual orientation and all of that. And I think there's some of those ways that we could be more diverse in that we could represent the needs and the wishes of everyone who lives here better, you know, if we hear from more folks. So wanting to get more renters involved, especially wanting to be a more racially diverse group. Our priorities for us and things that we're hoping that this door to door kind of canvassing campaign will help with.

(20:54)

Emily: That's cool. When are you starting that?

Maria: Hopefully in the next few weeks. So myself and two other neighbors, Katie

Maria Gurren

Vollmer-Prince and Haley Lynch are both in this kind of cohort of the Neighborhood Institute, which is through the Center for Neighborhoods. And so this is Katie and I's project and was kind of connected to Haley's project too because we're going to be recruiting renters who want to be involved in like some tenants' rights work through the canvassing as well. And so we actually just applied for a grant that would pay for door hangers for us, so that we can get door hangers printed and leave them on every house, you know, for folks who aren't home or don't have time for a conversation. So we can leave information. So ideally, we'll be door knocking, I think middle to the end of May. It's kind of the target. Once all the political campaigning for the May primaries are over, then we'll come with our door knocking.

(21:55)

Emily: Yeah, that makes sense. So who would you say, I mean, you know, you've talked about people involved in the neighborhood association, but do any other kind of neighborhood leaders stand out to you?

Maria: Oh, yeah, I mean, I think, you know, I think there's a lot of different ways that, that leadership shows up in our neighborhood. You know, for instance, I hadn't lived here very long. And this was my first house I've ever owned, I didn't own a lawn mower. I'm still figuring out the grass cutting situation. And I remember I went out of town. And I should have cut the grass before I left and I didn't, gotten it cut. And I came back and I had a note from someone who was a landlord and owns several houses on this block, but also grew up here and his family grew up here. And like I talked with him, his name's Curtis, very strong connections and ties to the neighborhood. And I had a little friendly note that let me know that we like to keep things looking clean and tidy around this block. And if I ever needed to him to cut the grass for a small fee that yeah, here's his number. And he looked forward to talking to me more about the neighborhood. And at first I was annoyed. I was kind of like, I can do whatever I want with my yard, you know, and then I kind of thought about it. And I was like, I'm so glad that someone cares enough about my little two squares of grass out in front of my yard and cares enough about this block and the way that it looks that they took the time to do that. But yeah, I think you know, there's folks that I've been on the neighborhood association with for several years, who, you know, Matt Rubin is our treasurer and he's doing tons of behind the scenes work all the time. And he's had a lot of... he did Neighborhood Institute before I did, and a lot of connections with New Roots. And Abby Long has been our secretary for the last couple years, and her and her husband live over on Clay Street facing the park. And you know, Justin Talia, who just moved recently to Texas, so he's not in the neighborhood anymore, but he was like, he was always the one who was going to notice the trash that wasn't emptied in the public trash can. The Spectrum and LG&E lines that were, uh, you know, hanging around the poles that were not tidy, like the cracks in the sidewalk, the, you know, he would... we used to tease him that he was like, you know, going to get in trouble for harassing public works as many emails as he sent to the city trying to get us the city services that we should have. So it's like everyone shows up in their own, in their own ways.

You know, one of my favorite events that we do now is the pumpkin patch. And Mitchell Hadley down the street had that idea of something. During Covid it was an event that we could do to bring some joy around a really difficult time in October of 2020 that was still socially distant and safe and outdoors and kids could come pick a pumpkin and a carbon kit and like a grab and go

Maria Gurren

thing. And it's like my favorite thing we do now. We did it in 2020 and 2021. We'll do it again this year, and it's grown every year. Last year, we gave out 200 pumpkins in like three or four hours, so.

Emily: Wow. That's impressive.

Maria: Yeah, yeah.

Emily: The lawn care. Is that Curtis Taylor? Just wondering.

Maria: Oh, over on Jackson Street?

Emily: Yeah.

Maria: No.

Emily: Oh, okay just checking. How do you think, you know, like residents, I guess, like, see the neighborhood? Like, how do you think that people who live here like kind of describe the neighborhood to other folks?

Maria: That's a good question. I think people describe it as both a hidden gem and a place that is still in progress. I think that there's a lot of folks that I work with through the Neighborhood Association who are really committed to improving, whether it's the built environment or advocating for city services that we need, or building more connectivity, building more programming, building more programming for youth. There's a lot of folks who are really dedicated to those kind of things. And there's lots of room for growth and improvement in that area. And I think that those same people would still talk about how special a place this is. And I think it varies, you know. I think that you're going to talk to people who have different opinions about the growth of the neighborhood, who have different opinions about whether it's a good or a bad thing that housing prices have gone up so much in the last few years. You know, I know that for some folks that's extremely exciting. And they're excited about the values of their homes, and all the new places that they can go to that are in walking distance and all the changes. And you know, some folks don't live in our neighborhood anymore, because some of their apartments have been flipped into businesses or different things like that. So I think that you definitely would hear a lot of different viewpoints. It wouldn't be, it wouldn't be a monolith for sure. But I think a lot of people would talk about this neighborhood as a very special place. They talk about the park and the architecture and the people and while also talking about the things that they want to see change.

(27:51)

Emily: How do you think outsiders like other neighborhoods see the neighborhood?

Maria: Oh, I think that varies even more. I think people who have been here probably have a different idea than people who haven't spent time here. I've had people tell me that, you know, this is a dangerous neighborhood. I've had people tell me that, you know, they're surprised that I

Maria Gurren

live here alone in this neighborhood, and you know, I think it would vary a lot. I think that we definitely have built a reputation of being, of having a small group of very active, very committed residents who are working on making this neighborhood better in a lot of different ways. And I think that that reputation is definitely out there, especially among folks who are involved in their own neighborhoods, you know. So, you know, I talk with folks who are involved in the Smoketown Neighborhood Association, and Germantown and Schnitzelburg and St. Joseph, and you know, so I think that some of our reputation of being a very active, having a very active group here has definitely spread. We've had folks reach out to us from other neighborhoods to say, hey, how did you do this? Or hey, you know, how did you plan this event? Or, you know, just recently, we had another neighborhood association, say, we're thinking about becoming a 501 C3 and we know that you are. Can we talk to you about it? And so I do think that that positive reputation is definitely out there. And then, you know, of course, you have folks who have a more negative opinion. But like I said, I think most of those folks haven't spent a lot of time here and they've just driven through or they can like vaguely point to Shelby Park on a map.

(29:35)

Emily: Yeah. Has that changed in the six years? Just because you've I mean, you've mentioned there's been a lot of change since you've lived here. So do you think it's been more positive? Or like when you first moved in like has there been a change in sort of like how people react to you moving here?

Maria: Yeah, definitely. And I think too when you talked about businesses, I kind of forget that it hasn't always been here. So I didn't even mentioned Logan Street Market, which is like one, I think had a gigantic impact on our neighborhood, and also been a great partner with Mike, Mike and Medora Safai. But yeah, I think because of the businesses and because more people have been here because they feel like they have a reason to go here, whether it's, you know, an event in the park or Trouble Bar, you know, being a nationally kind of recognized bar in the bourbon space, which is super exciting. Or Logan Street Market that draws a ton of people. I do think that the image of Shelby Park for folks who don't live here, and maybe from, you know, for folks who do too, has grown more positive in the time that I've been here. I think too that public safety here has improved in the time that I've been here, which is, obviously everybody wants to feel safe in their neighborhoods. And so that's something that I think everybody would say has improved in the time that I've been here.

(31:12)

Emily: So you are president of the neighborhood association. You talked about some of the stuff that you're planning. What do you say like kind of your goals are, and, you know, initiatives? Like I mean, you mentioned the door knocking campaign. That's really cool. And like anything else that you're kind of working on?

Maria: So much. I feel like we have our hands on everything. So affordable housing is something that's been a priority for us as a group for a long time that definitely predates me being here. And wanting to increase affordable housing options and support residents, especially long-term

Maria Gurren

residents, renters and homeowners, and being able to afford to stay here. I think providing for basic needs for people in the neighborhood, whether that's knowing what the nonprofits in our neighborhood need, and amplifying that. Or, you know, for instance, we just got a \$500 gift card from Kroger that we're going to use to stock the little free pantries around the neighborhood, we have three of them. So being aware of like folks basic needs. You know, partnering with new businesses, planning events. I think this summer we're probably going to have more events than we've had in a long time in the park and so activating the space that is the park is a big priority for us. In April, we're going to have Shakespeare in the Park. And hopefully, we'll have a music concert event in May partnering with David James, who's our new council person since redistricting. You know, he really has a priority of supporting us and activating the park, and in doing more concerts out there and more community events and you know, the historical preservation things, obviously, the work that you're doing fits right into that, but also pursuing Shelby Park being added to the National Register of Historic Places, through you know, the city has been helping us with that and there's a whole committee for that. The community garden project, about a year ago, we had a family reach out to us who inherited a little plot of land over on Preston that they didn't know was in their family. And when their grandfather passed, they discovered this little sliver of concrete that it butts up to 65 in the back, and is on the side of the railroad tracks and faces the back of the (inaudible) was in their family. And they were like, what are we going to do with this little piece of land? And so they reached out to us, got connected to us. And we turned it into a community garden. So we've probably had four build days over the last year, and there are seven raised beds there. We've spread mulch on the site. We're getting ready to build kind of a lean to structure that we can use to collect water. And there's a little free pantry on the site. We've removed dumpsters full of debris and dumping that was there. So that's just one of our projects. Then we have a garden committee that focuses on the Preston lot, and just signed a land use agreement with the family that we should be able to use it at least for the next five years. The food that's grown there gets shared with neighbors and anyone can come you know, can come take it. And if we have leftovers, we'll make sure it gets to good use with some of our nonprofits and things, so. We also have a lot of efforts around traffic calming and traffic safety. So we have a traffic safety committee that has met. There's actually \$3 million dollars in the state budget to work on traffic calming into a conversion for Logan and Shelby Street. And so that's really huge in terms of making our neighborhood more walkable, more pedestrian and bike friendly and just slowing people down rather than having people cut through our neighborhood or just speed down Logan Street until they get to their destination. So yeah, traffic calming. Public safety. And I think all the things that go along with public safety, like making sure that our community center is active with programming, and making sure that folks basic needs are met, making sure that we have, we're sharing the resources that are available, and you know, trying to hear from residents about what resources are still needed. You know, all the things that create a more supported and resource community that I think leads to better, you know, public safety outcomes, of course. I'm kind of going down the agenda in my mind of our meetings where our agenda will be like 20 items long sometimes of all the different things that we're working on. And then, of course, the special events, the things in the park, the pumpkin patch. We're getting ready to have our Compassionate Neighborhood Breakfast on April 23, which is something that this would be the ninth annual if it wasn't for Covid, this would be like the 11th annual, because we had the eighth in 2019. And then 2020 was canceled. And so it was 2021. So we're excited to have that again. So we'll be giving out our Friend of Shelby Park awards at the breakfast. And it's just a fun kind of excuse to get together and hang out and thank

Maria Gurren

and honor kind of our partners who have helped make some of our projects possible. You know, for instance, we had a business Deckel and Moneypenny whose business is really related to trade shows. And so during Covid, their business really slowed down, but they got some of the federal money for like the PPP funds. And so they were still paying people and people were coming to work without much to do and so they asked us what they could do they actually helped us hang signs in the neighborhood on utility poles. They removed every bench in the park and took it to their shop and cleaned and restored it and then reinstalled it. Folks like that, that we want to be able to say thank you and recognize at the breakfast. So yeah, affordable housing, public safety, meeting basic needs gardening and native plants. You know, we've advocated for different ordinances too so like, we'll write letters of support, you know, for like the native plant ordinance that just passed, we wrote a letter for. Or if there's other grants that are coming up. Chip has really spearheaded a lot of efforts for historical markers and making sure that, you know, the landmarks in our neighborhood are recognized, and that's preserved, and we're almost to 10, which when we get 10, we get a tour. So then we'll have like, an official tour.

(38:02)

Emily: Who creates the tour?

Maria: Oh I knew you were gonna ask me that.

Emily: That's okay if you don't know.

Maria: Well, and I've written them a letter of support for two of the historical markers. But I think it's the state historic preservation, folks, I'd have to look them up.

Emily: Like the Heritage Council?

Maria: Maybe.

Emily Skinner: Historic Preservation Office?

Maria: It might be, yeah.

Emily: I probably know whoever does that, anyway.

Maria: Yeah, yeah. But yeah, preserving history. And, and then the things you know, like the neighborhood cleanups, making sure that we're cleaning up the park and cleaning up trash, and those little things go a long way, but yeah, that's some of the stuff that the neighborhood's really focused on.

Emily: You mentioned that community center. I haven't heard anybody talk about that. Where is that?

Maria: So the community center is the 600 East Oak, the old Carnegie Library. In the park.

Maria Gurren

Emily: I didn't know that was being... well I know AMPED was there.

Maria: Yeah. So they still are. We've kind of had limited programming since they've been there, unfortunately. And we've been working to advocate for a tenant to go in that building when their lease is up. They can do more consistent programming, because prior to that, about five years ago, it was still operated by the city, and there was daily after school programming there for kids. So every day after school, there was staff from Metro government and you know programming that was going on in the building. It's where we used to have our monthly meetings all the way up until Covid and then, getting ready to go back in person because we've been meeting virtually throughout the pandemic. That community center has been through a lot of iterations. It was a library for the longest time and we really want to make sure that whoever has access to that space is able to provide consistent daily programming for youth. I'd love to see more like senior programming during the day too because right now, unfortunately, that giant gorgeous building is empty a lot.

Emily: So are you hoping like Metro goes back in there? Are you just hoping like another nonprofit occupies the space?

Maria: So we're still in conversations. I think the space is big enough that there could be several folks who had access to it. Because I think it's a lot for any one nonprofit to all of a sudden do daily programming five days a week. I think there's a lot of different ways that it could work. I think it could work with, you know, one or two people managing it and making sure that they're filling a calendar of stuff and getting it out to the neighborhood. But yeah, it's definitely. Yeah, I think that we have a lot of different options. I think that several organizations could benefit from being able to use this space and also provide a really valuable resource to by doing their programming here.

(41:17)

Emily: Yeah, and so the national register, so the grant that you got, from the city, or well, funding grant. How's that process going? I finished the surveys. Is it gonna end up with like a written National Register district nomination or...?

Maria: I don't know. I don't know how that's gonna work. There's a committee that's working on that and I'm not on it. Chip is on it. Matt Rubin is on it. I think a couple other folks in the neighborhood and then people from the city and Savannah Darr, and you know. But I know that they've done the survey and I'm not really sure exactly what the process is going to be, but there's hope on our end that we are designated as a national on the National Historic Register that we are designated as a neighborhood like a district. because the library already is, but for us to be added as a neighborhood I think would be really cool.

Emily Skinner: Yeah, I mean, you have I think at least like six sites on the National Register. But yeah, as a district, would you ever consider becoming like a landmark district with the city? I mean, that's a whole different ballgame.

Maria: Is that kind of like what Old Louisville has done?

Maria Gurren

Emily: Yeah, like Old Louisville, Limerick. Let's see Clifton.

Maria: And that's where there's some restrictions on like what can be done to properties and things if you're on that? If you're designated?

Emily: Yeah.

Maria: Yeah. We, I would have to look into it more. I know that when we were exploring the National Register project, at first, there was a lot of hesitation, because people thought that would be a restriction and it's not, but I know, that was a big concern that residents had about being limited and what they could potentially do to their own homes so we'd have to look at that and have some public conversations. And I definitely have to learn more about what that entails.

Emily: I know, Shelby Park's an opportunity zone and, you know, you kind of mentioned that you want to include more like renters and, you know, there are a lot of initiatives for like affordable housing. Well, since like, even the beginning of the neighborhood association that was like a top priority. And even like, you know, the bad word of gentrification. There have been a couple articles. You know, like, how, how do you see that? And maybe kind of like, how's the neighborhood association kind of dealing with, you know, those kinds of things?

Maria: Yeah. So I think depending on who you talk to, you'll get a very different answer about whether or not gentrification is an issue here. I would say, completely 100% without a doubt that it is an issue. Anytime you have set in growth in a neighborhood that impacts home values, and property taxes and rents, the way that the growth that we've experienced has, you're going to have people who are shut out, who are squeezed out of the neighborhood who are displaced, whether it's because of affordability or because maybe their landlord who's rented for the last 15 years has decided that they're going to turn that building into a business, or that they're going to flip their house and you know, remodel it and sell it and put it on the market. So I think that it's really difficult for us to know how many people have moved out or been displaced for what reasons. And I wish we knew that more because I know that it's happened. One of the reasons we want to go door to door is also to let folks know that we're here and that we can connect people to resources so that, you know, if there's somebody who doesn't even know that we exist, and they're dealing with these issues, maybe they don't know about some of the protections that are in place, or maybe they don't know about, like the homestead exemption that can keep your property taxes low if you're a longtime homeowner here. So yeah, it's definitely an issue. I also think that something that's often missing from the conversation about gentrification is the cultural component of gentrification. There are certain things when I first moved here that I had never encountered before never living in the heart of an urban neighborhood like this. I think that for instance to give some examples. You know, the dirt bikes in the park, I've never lived in a place that's in the middle of a city where kids are riding dirt bikes through a park, you know. People have a lot of feelings about that. Or the fact that if somebody is going to have an event at the shelter, it is not uncommon to have three, four or five cars or trucks just pulled up into the grass like somebody just went over the sidewalk and they're just parked there, you know, blasting music out of the stereo, cooking out of the truck, you know, whatever it is. Or just differences that you have. So you might have folks who have never lived in an urban neighborhood and are

Maria Gurren

here for all the other amenities of this neighborhood that then see things that they think are, “not okay”, just because they're things that they are unfamiliar with and for folks who have lived here for decades, this is all very normal. This is the way that things have been done. I think that the conflict that can happen there is definitely a part of gentrification as you have people at a different economic background of ease. You have more young white homeowners moving into a neighborhood that historically has been at a lower price point, and historically has been a lot more racially diverse, and all of those things. That's a part of gentrification that is also difficult to manage, but I think is just as important in terms of pushing people out of the neighborhood or even criminalizing certain behavior that's always, you know, that's been very much accepted by this community for a very long time. I think that those things aren't talked about as much as like, the price of housing, but I think it's just as important and we've definitely tried to hear from folks who have been here for a really long time when issues come up. And also just sometimes just telling people, you know, we might have a new resident who comes to a meeting, and they're complaining about something, and we might say, listen, it's been like that forever. This is kind of how it's done. That may not be what you're used to. It may be annoying, but that's not something we're going to get involved in, because welcome to Shelby Park. I think, you know, and you can see it with the, the businesses that have moved in. We lost our Save-A-Lot grocery store. For a long time, we had residents talking about, you know, what businesses were needed around here and it was things that were, you know, a grocery store and a laundromat, and somewhere that has childcare close. And the businesses that we've gotten, don't get me wrong, they're great. I love them. But it's been restaurants and bars and things that I think are arguably more for the demographic that's more recent to Shelby Park than folks who have been here for a really long time.

(49:14)

Emily: How do you work with, you know, like the city or anything? Like, how is it sort of like navigating stuff like that? That'd be a lot to take on. It's just like a neighborhood association, like other kind of, like resources out there. Is that something that you all have been able to utilize or hope that you know, there was something like that or...?

Maria: You mean to help with like navigating through gentrification typically?

Emily: Yeah.

Maria: I wouldn't say it's something we've worked with the city on, although it's definitely something that we've talked with our council person a lot. We talked with Councilman Arthur a lot about that when he was our council person. I don't know what resources are necessarily out there other than the things that are specifically about like housing affordability and property tax and like rent control type of things, but I think that a lot of it is like having really difficult conversations with each other about who we are and what kind of place we want to live in and recognizing that maybe we have a neighborhood association that's grown in numbers and some sort of power only in terms of just like us having a loud voice, but if we're not representative of the neighborhood, then that's also a problem, you know. Is that all of a sudden, there's this group that's speaking on behalf of the neighborhood that folks have been here for a long time are like, number one, we don't really know them. And number two, like, since when did this group of

Maria Gurren

people get to decide what was best for the neighborhood you know? And so I think that, yeah, I think that our role is really just to try to be as inclusive as a group and also as inclusive as possible when it comes to gathering voice on these things and talking to each other. I mean, when we had issues with the dirt bikes, it wasn't difficult to talk to the kids and their parents about it, because I knew who they were, because I've been talking to them since I lived here, you know, and I know where they live. And, you know, I think too, that some of the, some of the day to day challenges that we've had, especially around stuff in the park, and you know, drug use in the park, and unhoused folks using the park for different things that may or may not be their intended uses. You know, having just those types of those types of issues. I think we've also had to be really honest with ourselves and have real conversations about what can we really do about some of this stuff since most of it is contributing to a larger systemic problem, you know. If we had more youth programming here I might feel more comfortable being a little bit stricter about the dirt bikes, but I also recognize what our kids are on here supposed to do in the summer, you know? And their parents have bought them these things so that they can have fun and ride around and be kids. And, you know, not get involved in something that might be a bad influence. And I'd rather them be doing wheelies on the sidewalk, even though it's really loud and annoying, you know, then getting involved in something that could harm them. And the same way, especially with stuff with, I think substance use and unhoused folks in the park, is it's just encouraged. A lot of it has encouraged us to be more active and advocating for what we need to do on a city wide level to offer more services, provide for more housing, have new shelter options. You know, I'm excited about the, I don't know the name of it, but what the (inaudible) from the Hope Bus is doing in Old Louisville with building this, like, kind of anyone can come site that'll be for folks who don't have housing. And yes, I think we've had to be honest with ourselves of we don't want to contribute to any of like the criminalization of some of these things knowing that there's a real lack of options. And so I think we've had to be honest with ourselves about what can realistically do as our little group. And then what can we you know, about the individual issue that we're dealing with? And then what can we do on a larger scale to advocate for the more long-term solutions and the investment in root cause stuff so that maybe down the line no one's presented with these issues because everyone's taken care of.

(54:19)

Emily: Well, on a lighter note, just to kind of wrap things up what's one of your favorite recollections or memories of living here?

Maria: Mm. So many things.

Emily: It can be more than one.

Maria: Yeah. I think pulling off the pumpkin patch in the middle of a pandemic and having kids be really excited to be there. I think even more than that, seeing the looks on faces of parents who were like really grateful that they just got to take their kid to something fun, you know, when like, schools were closed. Holidays didn't look like holidays, nobody really knew if we were even going to have trick or treat at all. And we were able to bring people together in a way that was free, in a way that felt safe in the middle of the pandemic, and then that event every year, I think will be my favorite thing. You know, we did it last year and we partnered with

Maria Gurren

Olmsted Park. So we also had games and a DJ and a food truck and a beer garden.

Emily: That sounds awesome.

Maria: Oh, it was an amazing day. And, you know, it was so stressful leading up to it. And then the weather, we had to cancel. It was supposed to be Friday night, and we had to cancel and make it Saturday afternoon. And we're like, no one's gonna know and no one's gonna come and it ended up being like gorgeous, and we gave away every single pumpkin. So I think that like, events like that and then just, it's all of the little moments of connection with the people that I wouldn't have met had it not been for me living here and being involved in the community that this is, you know. It's hard for me to go anywhere in and around this neighborhood and not run into someone from the neighborhood, whether it's, you know, I just saw Betty the other day at the grocery store and she's like I don't think I got the minutes from last meeting, I was like, okay, I'll talk to Adam, he'll email you. It's all those connections and learning people's stories who I've met through the neighborhood, you know, and people who have grown up here their whole lives and live here. People who came from other states, people who have been here for 50 years, and people have been here for two years. I think that a lot of those little moments. Just like hanging out on the front porch with neighbors, and like having the kids down the street come and just sit on my front porch and hang out and like tell me about their school day or tell me about how excited they are for like their cousin's birthday party that weekend. I think that those little things really add up, really add up to something special that makes this place like feel like a community.

(57:12)