

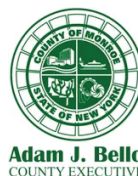
# Research Paper #5: Lyell-Otis Neighborhood Snapshot (12/21/2023)



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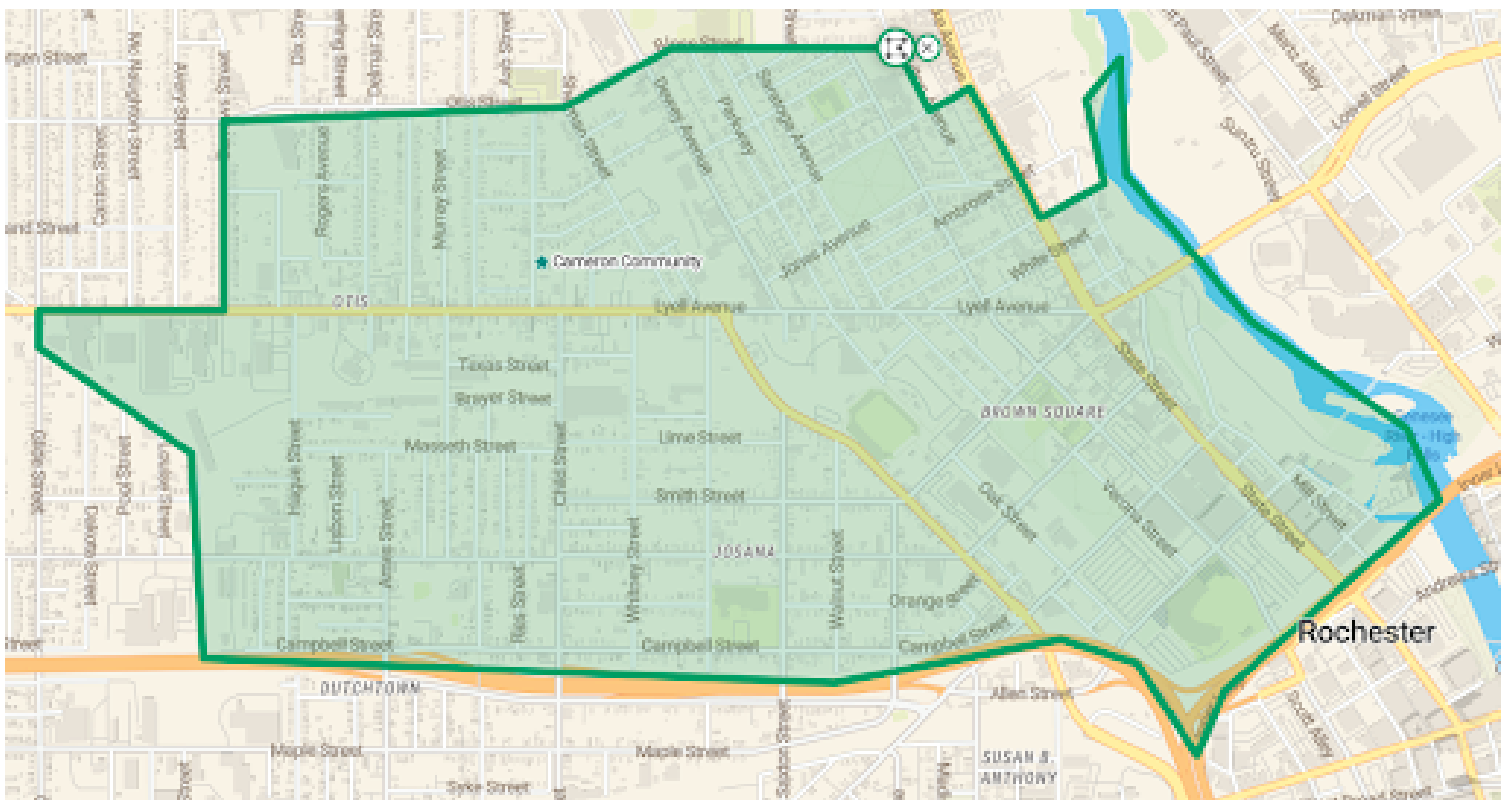
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The Lyell-Otis neighborhood has been known for its historic roots in Rochester, dating back to 1884. The roots of the first part of the name can be found within Lyell Avenue, which is known for its historic landmarks. The second part “Otis” is in relation to the Army General Elwell Stephen Otis, who fought for the US in numerous wars since 1861, including the Civil War. To commemorate his return from the Spanish-American War, a large arch was built on Main Street and at the end of East Avenue, and June 15th was to be “Otis Day” for Rochestarians. Although Otis’s celebratory day may not have lasted overtime, Lyell became Lyell-Otis in his memory.

Since then, the community has grown through decades of culture and community involvement. Although the community has a blossoming culture, it is not without its challenges. This paper will examine both the strengths and challenges of the Lyell-Otis Neighborhood. This is a series of three research papers highlighting the three quadrants that the Neighborhood Collaborative Project (NCP) is focused on bringing services back into these neighborhoods (for more info, see [rocnpc.org](http://rocnpc.org)). For this paper, On the Ground Research staff interviewed Jonathan Hardin, the Community Engagement Director at Cameron Community, to learn about the neighborhood from someone who both lives and works in the community.



The map above shows the outline of what the Neighborhood Collaborative Project has identified as the Northwest NCP impact area. The neighborhood described in this paper, the Lyell-Otis Neighborhood, falls within these boundaries.

## Demographics

Historically, Lyell-Otis was the home of both German and Italian immigrants, but today it is largely made up of Black (41%), White (28.3%), and Hispanic (19.2%) families. (All unlinked data is from PolicyMap database.) When asked about the Italian community and demographic shift, Jonathan mentioned some Italian friends that used to live in the neighborhood:

*"I have some friends who grew up a few streets over, and their families all moved to Gates. They lived on Myrtle, which is a parallel street to Cameron. They went to school 54 when it was, I think, maybe another school at that time. But they just slowly all moved to Gates in the migration."*

This shift can be attributed to Rochester's various waves of immigration throughout the years, the most recent being the second wave of migration of African Americans from the south post World War II. According to the Census, around 14.3% of the population does not speak English as their first language, likely due to the steady immigrant influx throughout the years. Lyell-Otis's median age is 30 years old, with a population averaging as low as 23 in some blocks. In addition, a critical feature of this community is that almost a quarter of the population has a disability. However, Lyell-Otis is a medically underserved community which means many people are not able to access the medical services they need (U.S. Census).

All of these features culminate into a community with a unique history, an interesting culture, but also with distinct needs. These needs may be met by more accessible infrastructure or help for those needing assistance with immigration documents or resettlement services.

## Income

Due to varying jobs and employment statuses, incomes are very staggered in the neighborhood. Lyell-Otis's unemployment rates are wide-ranging, with some blocks being as low as 3%, while others as high as 25% unemployed. This range in employment can affect many aspects of income and living situations. With 47% of the population living in poverty and the average median household income ranging from \$14,000 to \$35,000, many households work more than one job. There are other features of housing and income that show a glimpse into the economic landscape of the neighborhood. With high housing turnover rates and vacancies, the neighborhood seems to struggle with getting and retaining homeowners in the community. However, the high vacancy rate may also be related to the number of families in poverty being so high, alongside many families relying on subsidized housing. One-fifth of families in Lyell-Otis are living in deep poverty, which the U.S. Census Bureau defines as living in a household with a total cash income below 50 percent of its poverty threshold. This trend has persisted for over 30 years indicating a history of inequality within the neighborhood, and lack of investment in the neighborhood. Overall, many residents here struggle economically and have a difficult time getting out of poverty as evidenced by the extremely low upward mobility rates ranging between 2-4%. This issue has only gotten worse due to inflation. Jonathan raised concerns that the residents are struggling to make ends meet due to their social security checks not increasing to match the rate of inflation. While commenting on the financial struggles of the Lyell-Otis neighborhood, Jonathan said:

*"There was a house on Otis Street, which was going for \$1,400 a month, which I was blown away. And then they wanted the lady to have three times that in monthly income."*

He also mentioned that she couldn't afford it despite having a full-time job and a part-time secondary job.

## Education/Employment

Education levels in Lyell-Otis are proficient as the majority of the population has achieved at least a high school diploma (71%). There are three schools located within the boundaries of the neighborhood, with the highest level of education being 8th grade at these schools. Both Pre-K-8 schools perform below expectations for both math and reading. This can stagnate students' educations and have a long-term effect on employment opportunities. When it comes to attaining a bachelor's degree, a very low percentage of Lyell-Otis residents have earned one.

The employment landscape in Lyell-Otis is diverse. Around 25% of the population works in service occupations and another 25% are in transportation and production and 26% are in management or STEM positions. Overall, there is not a concentrated industry within the neighborhood and residents have the opportunity to explore various jobs within different sectors. However many of these jobs may not be sufficient as about 15% of the neighborhood has an additional job, which is double the national average.

## Crime

Although the Lyell Otis community is full of vibrant residents, there is persistent crime within the neighborhood. In 2022 alone there were 78 cases of aggravated assault and 11 murders. Many of these crimes were located close to or just outside of the local public schools. One murder even happened outside of Public School #7 right before 9am, while school was in session. In addition to these crimes, there were also 32 robberies throughout Lyell-Otis. Overall there was no specific pattern of or specific area these crimes were concentrated in, however there has been an overall decrease in crime since 2018. In addition, there is a drug epidemic in the area too, to the point that some stores have been aiding in the sale. According to Jonathan, gangs can be found outside of these stores, likely guarding the sale from outside interference. As a result, many residents don't feel safe buying products from these stores, either to avoid being associated with the drug business or due to a lack of safety when approaching them.



## Culture

Lyell-Otis has been a center of culture for the community since its inception. With original hubs such as the Holy Apostles Church, to today's centers being the Lyell branch library and numerous parks. The library is especially vital due to its relationship between the government, residents and neighborhood association. The library provides numerous services and programs to residents. Also, Jonathan described a former yearly music festival at one of the local bars. However, they stopped due to the increase in crime around the area. In addition to the library there are other community resources such as the Lyell Ave Business Association (LABA), a volunteer-based business organization that seeks to uplift and promote businesses in the Lyell Avenue area, and Loving Arms Outreach, a group that conducts outreach in the community weekdays from 3 PM to 7 PM and weekends from 11 AM to 2 PM.

Another hub of community is Cameron Community, which has been serving members since 1984. With various programs from food, education, clothing, children and teen services, gardening and many more, the center has become a hub of culture within the community. Many of the programs cultivate a community of development and kindness. Jonathan mentioned that Cameron plans on reaching out to businesses in the neighborhood to gauge interest in events that would bring people outside, such as barbecues and block parties. In addition, according to Jonathan,

“It's [the Lyell-Otis neighborhood] a melting pot. So there's not one particular culture. You may have a Jamaican restaurant on one corner, a Puerto Rican restaurant on another corner, the soulfood place a little bit down.”

Cameron Community Center embraces the multicultural community. The Community Garden does a great job at this, since it allows people of all cultures to share a space to grow fresh produce, thereby providing opportunities for different groups of people to interact and build a sense of community. One key piece of the Lyell-Otis culture is their dvd, “The History of Lyell-Otis” , which memorialized older neighbors' memories of the community and their experience growing up within it. This DVD acts as a time capsule of the culture and history of the communities longest members. Most events are primarily neighborhood-organized, with the city only offering to provide beverages, assistance with event sponsorship, and catering.

Jonathan Hardin is originally from Mississippi, but moved to Rochester with his husband twelve years ago. He has been working with Cameron for six years, starting as a volunteer, and joined their staff in the Spring of 2023. He was drawn to Cameron because of their dedication and effectiveness in serving their community and he wanted to use some of his time to help give back to the community. His favorite part about the neighborhood is the diversity and acceptance he's witnessed over the years. During the first community picnic he went to, he saw people of many different racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds together at the park. Jonathan also serves as the Neighborhood Collaborative Project Liaison for Cameron Community.