

CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION**Welcome to City Hall!** – Program Report

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Community Development

DIRECTION NEEDED FROM COUNCIL**INFORMATION
ONLY**

Tonight's presentation will provide a report on a new Neighborhood Outreach program, **Welcome to City Hall!** – designed to provide a language-accessible orientation to Bellevue's government and a welcome program to help integrate residents to the community. This presentation is for information only, no Council action is being sought.

RECOMMENDATION

N/A

BACKGROUND & ANALYSIS

One of the City Council's priorities is to increase "the availability of and need for multi-cultural programming in the City." It is crucial to build trust with newcomers to our City and it can be particularly challenging to engage with those who are immigrants with cultural and language barriers. Many new residents are unaccustomed to the cultural norms of the United States and they often come from places where fear of government is prevalent and civic engagement and volunteerism are not common practice. Neighborhood Services continually seeks new and culturally responsive approaches with immigrant and underrepresented populations.

Welcome to City Hall! is the first time that the City has provided an in-person educational resource entirely in the native language of non-English speaking attendees. This allowed residents to comfortably learn in their own language, and provided the opportunity to meet and interact with their neighbors and helped them to create relationships in their new community.

Welcome to City Hall! was designed to personalize an introduction to city government, to provide a welcoming environment, a basic educational program in the resident's native language, and a toolbox of future opportunities to engage. The first pilot **Welcome to City Hall!** event was targeted specifically to the Chinese community. The Asian population is the largest growing group in Bellevue and the Chinese community comprised over 18,000 of Bellevue's residents in 2015 and continues to grow.

With minimal marketing, **Welcome to City Hall!** welcomed 85 attendees, 80 percent of whom speak Mandarin as their first language. In addition to the large Chinese contingent, English-speaking newcomers from other areas of the northwest, the US and around the world attended, and response

from them was positive as well.

Welcome to City Hall! was held on Friday, May 17, 11 a.m. – 2 p.m. The main objective of the day was to create a comfort level in interacting with City staff and leadership, for participants to learn some basics of how government functions, how to personally participate and how to access City resources.

The program was a One City effort, incorporating staff participation and insights of multiple departments, and included the following elements:

- Photo opportunities with City Council, the police chief and fire chief;
- Resource tables featuring printed materials from multiple departments in English and Chinese;
- Welcome message from Deputy Mayor Lynne Robinson;
- Presentation on Bellevue government followed by a Question and Answer period;
- Lunch with bi-lingual volunteer table hosts with questions encouraging “How I came to Bellevue” stories; and
- City Hall Tours including:
 - Meet and greet with Chief Mylett and a briefing on the 911 Call Center,
 - First floor City Hall, including history, architecture and art, and how to access City services,
 - Orientation to the Traffic Management Center, and
 - Orientation by Utilities to clean water, storm water and recycling.

Lessons Learned

There are a few key findings that occurred when organizing an event like **Welcome to City Hall!**

1. There is community demand for **Welcome to City Hall!** and multi-lingual offerings.
2. Providing culturally appropriate materials and translation services requires the expertise of multi-lingual staff and volunteers in addition to professional interpreters/translators.
3. Each Welcome to City Hall! event must be customized and marketed to the targeted cultural community.
4. The program is interdepartmental and must be very intentional, with greeters at all entry points, bi-lingual directional signs, key messages pre-defined for ease of translation and written materials in native language. It is critical to have every portion of the program crafted with the ease and comfort of the participants native language as a priority.

Next steps

Staff is evaluating which cultural communities would be most receptive to future **Welcome to City Hall!** events and are making plans to offer three events in additional languages in Spring 2020.

Testimonials from attendees:

- *“This is wonderful! I never knew City Hall can be so friendly and accessible. This totally changed my mind about government.”*

- *“It was so thoughtful, with interpretation throughout the whole event. I don’t think I have ever been to anything like this!”*
- *“The fact that you created something like this to welcome immigrants is remarkable. Thank you so much!”*

POLICY & FISCAL IMPACTS

Policy Impact

Council’s 2018-2020 Priorities include “Continue to implement the Diversity Plan, including the availability of and need for multi-cultural programming in the City.” **Welcome to City Hall!** was a first-time approach to providing a completely bi-lingual event to make learning about City government and services more accessible to Bellevue’s community with a welcome program to help integrate residents to the community.

Fiscal Impact

There was no fiscal impact incurred by the event. **Welcome to City Hall!** was fully funded within the adopted 2019-2020 budget.

OPTIONS

N/A

ATTACHMENTS & AVAILABLE DOCUMENTS

N/A

AVAILABLE IN COUNCIL LIBRARY

N/A