



DATE: September 16, 2019

TO: Mayor Chelminiak and City Councilmembers

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SUBJECT: 2019 Neighborhood Walks

For information only; no action is required.

Policy Direction

The City Council's Vision Priorities for 2018-2020 for being a High-Performance Government includes the direction: "Building trust in government by developing and implementing a comprehensive communication plan with proactive strategies...". This priority builds from the principle that "The more we listen, the more responsive we are."

Background

Continuing the engagement efforts of the 2017 Summer Chats and the 2018 Neighborhood Walks, the City Manager, Leadership Team and City staff led Neighborhood Walks in five more neighborhood areas in 2019. The areas where staff members walked and visited with residents included: West Bellevue, the EasTrail (ERC), Woodridge, West Lake Sammamish and Eastgate. Over the three summers, staff have coordinated 15 events in neighborhoods.

Summary

This year, the walks were shortened to about 1.5 miles, and residents were provided the routes so that they could meet staff at any point in the evening. The walking routes were also flatter than previous years to make them more accessible. Prior to the walks, staff consulted with neighborhood contacts to confirm that the route incorporated a variety of points of interest, including the concerns most common in their neighborhood. The Neighborhood Walks included representative homes and changes, major streets and traffic, parks and schools, specific areas of concern, tree removal, NEP projects, the Sound Transit light rail line and other landmarks. Walks were attended by an average of 19 residents and by 12-15 City staff.

Quick Stats

- **5 walks** were held in June and July
- **A total of 45 Leadership Team directors and City staff** walked with residents
- **98 residents** walked, including ages 5-80
- **An average of 19 residents** participated in a portion of each walk
- **6 dogs** walked with us!

Each Neighborhood Walk was about two hours in duration, including group conversation at the beginning and end, during which community members shared what they enjoy about their neighborhood, their concerns and ideas for the area and for the City, the history of the area, unique assets and emerging issues. Resident comments varied by neighborhood but in every neighborhood, comments included:

- Concern about changing neighborhood character, and vacant homes which negatively effects the ability to connect and to be a cohesive neighborhood;
- Gratitude for their neighbors and the history of the neighborhood;
- Concern about Citywide and regional development, and the impact on neighborhood traffic and vehicular speeding through residential areas;
- Appreciation for City parks and services; and
- Concern about the tree canopy, and desire for natural assets to be valued and preserved.

The walks provide opportunities for City staff to see and hear what is unique and important to the community, share their responsibilities with the City, and hear neighborhood-specific concerns. It is also a good opportunity to provide residents information on how to best connect with staff, and how to report concerns. During each walk, staff shared the benefits of residents utilizing the MyBellevue app. City staff also documented residents' concerns, such as requests for additional park services or crosswalks or code compliance issues. Specific requests or concerns were assigned to appropriate City staff or departments. Ideas of a more general nature were shared with department leadership.

At the conclusion of each walk, City staff shared what they had heard during the walk during a group conversation, and resident comments and concerns were documented by staff. Walkers from the neighborhood had "the final word" at the end of each walk. Some of the specific comments shared included:

- "We love our views and the convenience of elementary schools and freeways."
- "Ours is an active neighborhood with walkers, runners, gardeners, bikers, and people of all ages out and about."
- "Don't forget our neighborhood! We have concerns about traffic on Newport Way!"
- "Traffic calming has been helpful."
- "How can we downsize and stay in our community?"
- "Can we get camera monitoring of traffic in the area around Eastgate Elementary School?"
- "The neighborhood liaison program should be more widely known."
- "Will neighborhoods have the final say if we want or don't want ADUs?"
- "Please connect Surrey Downs to EasTrail!"

- “I’m concerned about the height of the Sound Transit sound wall. It follows the ground level but doesn’t protect my home.”
- “The City doesn’t seem to enforce codes for house size and setbacks.”
- “Consider using natural ways to combat highway noise.”
- “We love our NEP project!”
- “This City is well-run.”
- “There needs to be more policing of speeders. There are no consequences now.”

Next Steps

Over three summers, Neighborhood Walks and Summer Chats have been held in most of the City’s 16 neighborhood areas. During each series of walks, the Neighborhood Outreach office receives requests to schedule walks in additional neighborhoods. We are beginning to consider walk areas for next summer, and look forward to visiting with many more residents, and seeing their unique neighborhood. Consideration will continue to be given on making Neighborhood Walks as accessible as possible, and to increasing resident attendance.