

Neighborhood Leadership Gathering
“Changing Face of Bellevue”
February 28, 2017
Meeting Summary

On February 28, 2016, Neighborhood Outreach hosted a meeting with over 80 neighborhood leaders in attendance. Mayor Stokes introduced the evening and spoke about the opportunities that a diverse community provides and cited examples of how that diversity benefits our City. City Manager Miyake recognized the leadership of Bellevue’s neighborhood leaders, Bellevue’s Diversity Advisory Network, Bellevue’s Network on Aging, and city staff in working together to make Bellevue a great place to live.

Gwen Rousseau, City Demographer, presented the Changing Face of Bellevue, providing demographics that highlighted many aspects of diversity including cultural, job, age, household and economic diversity. Mark Manuel, Diversity and Engagement Administrator led the group through two exercises that helped define the diversity present within the room, and helped participants reflect on their own cultural identifiers and how they affect our daily interactions.

The Bellevue Diversity Advisory Network (BDAN) was introduced. BDAN is focused on supporting City efforts to be effective with outreach and communication, community engagement, and a government that is culturally responsive. BDAN has 21 members who live and/or work in Bellevue and provide varied perspectives and experiences working with and being part of diverse communities. Five of the members; Linda Whitehead, Mareth Flores, Alaric Bien, Mohamed Bakr and Rita Badh served on a panel that addressed questions from the audience about diversity and how it affects our neighborhoods. The two major themes that emerged during the evening were how to overcome cultural and language barriers to create community engagement opportunities for diverse cultures, and the effect of extensive foreign investment and vacant homes in our neighborhoods.

Questions for the Diversity Advisory Network Panel:

Community Engagement/ Language and Cultural Barriers

- Can you give some practical suggestions that can help break down language barriers in my neighborhood? People seem so quiet and reserved and don’t talk to each other.
- In my condo we have mostly homeowners who are Caucasian. In the last 2 years many Asians have moved in who are renters. We nod at each other in passing, but we never talk to each other. How do we get past this barrier?
- How can neighborhoods attract persons of color to our neighborhood meetings?
- How do I engage new neighbors who come from other countries and do not seem interested in engaging?
- How do I engage my new neighbors? I’ve tried and they don’t seem to want to join in.
- What is the biggest blocker to engagement?
- What are some of your approaches when facing a person of another culture you are in conflict with?
- Are there more common or normalizing elements or activities that can be used to foster greater inclusion across diverse cultural values when running community events?
- How can people in senior communities connect with the diverse community we live among in downtown Bellevue?

- How do we become more involved on a day to day basis in creating more diversity in Bellevue?
- Just finished a 2 year program called Courageous Conversations at Bellevue School District. Is something like this a possibility as a course offered by the City?
- Lake Hills Neighborhood Association has 50 – 60 attendees for our meeting – it appears about 90% white, and 60% over age 60. How do we attract other cultures, races to our meetings?

Homelessness:

- How do you handle homeless folks and facilities?
- How can we help homeless to improve their lives?

Demographics:

- How are demographics generated and at what frequency are they updated?
- Do the #'s include short term contract workers?

Resources:

- With the rapid growth we're experiencing how do you make sure we have sufficient high quality resources?
- What does City of Bellevue do to undertake inclusive outreach for various city projects (eg..roadway projects?)

Written Comments Submitted:

What challenges and opportunities does Bellevue's diversity present in your neighborhood?

Language:

- Why our schools are not teaching at least one additional language, where they could be fluent

Engagement/Cultural Barriers:

- The feeling of belonging and having artifacts of your culture represented in City/neighborhood.
- How to bridge different languages and cultures within neighborhoods.
- Most community volunteers are old or relatively old people. Younger people and younger parents seem to have less interest in volunteering. In my opinion, volunteer opportunity could help people, especially young people to grow and learn leadership skills.
- Challenges: Mobility for children, elderly, disabled and low income. Lake Hills has suddenly become a pocket of people without cars, and crossing 148th is a challenge.
- Opportunities: Gathering places for different age groups. Need more places for young single people. Independent coffee shops, small music venues.
- We need more community engagement in Lake Hills. We need a block party every month. Lake Hills would benefit from its own community center, separate from businesses. Just a place people come to do community building. People need purpose to get engaged. They need a cause and a goal. Relationships are built in the process of doing.
- Challenges: Break the ice. Not all change is "good" change: tree loss, traffic over speeds, new drivers to understand signage, education adaptation of language and culture; and good change requires not only conversation but the ability to care about each other to the point of commitment to and support of each other. Smooth transitions require positive responses to difficult questions.
- Opportunities follow through – not all change is "bad" change. World views of economics, education that emphasizes science and computer science, to share ethical dialogues, for sincerity and truth and to agree to disagree, to put "anger" on hold, to learn ways to share without devaluing others thoughts or strengths. Smooth transitioning requires positive responses to difficult questions.
- Flow of information, engagement and more outside of groups

- Opportunity of more family, more nurture. Lack of villages to come unexpectedly.
- Add cultural identification, close helpful family, economics
- How can the Chinese trust the government and get the help they need? Also they don't know how to get the help they need.
- Balance resources between planning more programs and implementing person to person building relationships, mentoring, etc. Then go on the other side of 405, Crossroads and onward. Listen 50% of the time, have more Q and A time.
- One of our newest neighbors in our community actually lives in China (the husband) and wife and son live in Downtown Bellevue. We've tried to reach out to them, to invite them to neighborhood gatherings, but they don't attend and their house remains unoccupied. How can we do better?
- Opportunities to learn from one another and extend our world view and experience. There is strength in numbers. Challenges...how do we actually make those connections? Public events? Lectures?

Economic Issues

- Income diversity or class is a serious opportunity in Bellevue. Limited housing that is affordable, low income or subsidized is lacking. We also need to provide shelter for Bellevue residents without homes.
- Increase in property taxes, utility taxes and utility rates are far too high
- Developers are not paying their fair share of costs for new infrastructure (roads, utilities, parks, etc)
- City should not seek TIFSA funding for Bel Red road network; costs should be paid for by Bel-Red owners and developers. Copies of charts presented at meeting should be available before or at the meeting

Influx of New Owners, Absentee Owners, and Rentals:

- Seeing an increase of absentee homes in my neighborhood. Challenges are: maintenance of empty homes, lack of participation in community and HOA. Many are Chinese owners and it sometimes creates a stereotype of disengaged owners and causes conflicts with other home owners.
- The challenges our neighborhood faces has to do with fewer members participating and volunteering for the HOA. We have multiple events, social and work parties, budget meetings and salmon bakes, however there is an increasing number of people who buy a house, but don't move in. Despite our efforts to reach out, they remain aloof, and/or not present in the neighborhood.
- How to introduce and acclimate longtime residents with new home owners who leave their property mostly unoccupied or rent it out. These are most often owned by investors from other countries, so language and culture may be a barrier too. The exercise was especially enlightening.
- Newcomers from Asia with large disposable income drive housing prices up and not even move in changing the nature of neighborhood into a ghost town. Schools are a great draw to this same population but the schools are changing quickly due this quick growth and usually not for the better. Greater competition over limited resources that can't keep up with growth. Library can't keep up with growth. Not enough choice schools. Class sizes grow. Camps (summer and breaks) are limited. This is a great city and we would like to continue enjoying the same quality of life and opportunities.
- A growing amount of external investment in real estate, especially homes, which is hiking up real estate prices and making it difficult for potential residents who want to live here and bring

up their families here, to buy a home. There needs to be a balance between those buying homes purely for investment and those buying because they want to live here.

- New home owners who move into Bellevue from out of country have not paid into the infrastructure of the amenities we enjoy. Should have them pay an “entry tax” to meet the need for schools, teachers and police. Should they pay a tax like Vancouver, BC to meet our new costs?

Other:

- How about rezone of land use to accommodate inter-generational communities and intentional communities.
- There is no provision for public input into the council’s selection of projects for the City transportation and neighborhood improvement projects.
- Audio system is poor in Room 108