

SYNOPSIS OF FOCUS GROUP INPUT ON THE DESIGN OF THE CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY

MAY 2014



CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY

Introduction

At the advice of our Citizens' Assembly consultant, City staff held a series of small focus group sessions with groups that were unable to participate in the larger workshop and online consultation. The intent of these additional discussions was to ensure a broad mix of perspectives which were included as part of the design of the Grandview-Woodland Citizens' Assembly.

A total of six focus group sessions were conducted to gather input from Aboriginal organizations, social service providers, multicultural organizations, business associations and youth.

Focus groups were held with the following organizations and their members:

- Commercial Drive, Hastings North Business Improvement Association (BIA)
- Aboriginal service providers
- Latin American youth and Youth Council at Britannia Community Centre
- Kiwassa Neighbourhood House Youth
- Grandview-Woodland Area Services Team (including representatives from area social service providers)
- Multicultural service providers

A total of 46 people participated in the supplemental engagement sessions.

At each focus group session, participants were provided with an overview of the Grandview-Woodland planning program and an introduction about Citizens' Assemblies and the proposed Grandview-Woodland Assembly. After an open question and answer period, participants were invited to weigh in while City staff took notes. Discussion was guided by each group's area of interest, and topics included:

- Thoughts on the pros and cons of the Assembly process
- Member composition, representation and recruitment
- Mandate and tasks of the Assembly – key issues and areas of focus
- Recruitment – diverse engagement strategies and ongoing involvement of broader community
- Supports needed to enable participation of Assembly members

Key ideas and suggestions from focus group sessions

Grandview-Woodland BIAs (Commercial Drive, Hastings North)

February 18, 2014 at Hastings North BIA

- Time commitment required for Citizens' Assembly members will likely inhibit business owners' involvement. Business owners may be more likely to complete surveys to share their ideas than spend time away from their business.
- During the Learning Phase, the business community could provide a presentation on topics such as: business-related implications of neighbourhood change, residential development, industrial lands, goods movement, impacts of Plan to local economy and their profitability.
- Ensure a balance of views between those wanting change with those who don't want change.
- Mandate and tasks:
 - » Address the role of density in accommodating growth.
 - » Don't get sidetracked with too many granular issues.
 - » Examine how the Industrial Lands will be impacted as growth occurs (limitations on types of industry, mitigating conflict between industrial and residential areas).
 - » Explore ways to expand opportunities and protect commercial areas for small independent businesses.
 - » More focus on local economy in the final Community Plan.

Aboriginal Service Providers

April 16, 2014 at Aboriginal Friendship Centre

- Include Aboriginals in membership selection and Aboriginal perspective in learning materials component. Need to ensure they are represented in the process.
- Ensure Aboriginal people are active in the conversation during the process by partnering with Aboriginal leaders to host community forums at the Friendship Centre as a means of learning and listening
- During the Learning Phase, involve Aboriginal leaders, elders, service providers, and use existing resources (e.g. existing reports and studies on Aboriginal issues).
- Possible topics for the Assembly: housing, child apprehension, transitions for families, people still affected by the residential school system
- Mandate and tasks:
 - » Plan needs to ensure creation of affordable housing for Aboriginal people, particularly those facing poverty.
 - » Explore partnerships between local Aboriginal/ community leaders and developers to create employment opportunities.

Youth – Britannia Centre & Kiwassa Neighbourhood House

April 17 & 24, 2014 - at Britannia CC and Kiwassa Neighbourhood House

- 16 years+ is a good age for participation in the Citizens' Assembly, ("The voice of young people is too often unheard... so let's change that")
- Strong support for a youth group/council that would parallel Assembly program and process. Youth are interested in participating but may be intimidated to speak their minds at the Assembly meetings. They may feel safer diving deeper into topics amongst peers.
- During the Learning Phase, provide materials that highlight youth successes and de-mystify youth culture versus focusing on problem areas (e.g. drugs, partying)
- Mandate and tasks:
 - » Discuss neighbourhood change. (Change is okay, but it's about the pace of change and nature of change. Some things need to be preserved.)
 - » Address shortage of local job opportunities for youth 16-18 years in the community
 - » Renovate affordable rental units of new stock and existing rental stock.
 - » Look at building heights and changes near transit areas, specifically Broadway/ Commercial.
 - » Provide more places to gather (youth friendly indoor and outdoor open spaces, art cafes and galleries)
- Supports for participation: food at meetings, access to future employment, bursary for school, gift card for food (e.g. Donald's Market), pick up and drop off shuttle, youth workers are huge asset – use them, meeting the Mayor.

Grandview-Woodland Area Services Team

April 29, 2014 at Britannia CC

- Ensure clear membership representation criteria in the selection process. Process would benefit from participation by low- income individuals (and/or those dealing with income insecurity, living beyond their means), immigrants, urban native youth, renters, business owners
- 16 years is an acceptable minimum age for Assembly membership
- Supplemental focus group sessions would likely work best for at-risk and diverse populations. People feel safe when they are in familiar groups.
- During the Learning Phase, highlight social issues people have to deal with, challenges that come from government funding cuts, access to basic needs, income assistance, access to food, impacts of grocery costs, and affordable rent.
- Ensure materials are prepared in an easy-to-understand format as many people don't understand planning work, civic issues. (Suggestion: a comic book)
- Mandate and tasks:
 - » Examine affordable housing (suggestion: an inventory of purpose built rental housing in Grandview-Woodland, co-ops, different typologies of housing). Be clear about "what affordability means" as this is a key issue and is indexed to people's income.
 - » Ensure sufficient amenities (e.g. parks) and services as the neighbourhood grows and density increases.
 - » Focus on local economy and affordability.
- Supports for participation: child care, shuttle for seniors, separate youth group representation, translation services, peer-to-peer/buddy support, potentially case worker support.

Multicultural Service Providers (MOSAIC, Kiwassa)

May 6, 2014 at MOSAIC

- Many newcomers will not have the required facility in English to participate, or participate actively. Also, older community members may still speak a non-English mother tongue. Some could come and listen/learn, but the process would be intimidating.
- Other barriers include cultural differences, as for many the concept of 'deep civic engagement' is a foreign idea. Also, many are simply too busy with getting settled for the required time commitment. At the same time, it's important to look for ways to boost civic engagement amongst newcomers and non-English speakers.
- Providing ongoing translation would be good; however, separate focus groups with newcomers/non English speakers could also help them to follow along with Community Plan/Assembly work.
 - » Conduct 'pre-engagement' consultation efforts to help with understanding of information.
 - » Use facilitators/translators to guide participants through the issues to be deliberated, via parallel workshops.
- During the Learning Phase, a 'caucus of newcomer/non-English speakers and/or multicultural service providers could give a presentation to the Assembly about their issues and perspectives
- Assembly could also 'test' their ideas/recommendations with the multicultural community during the 'Listening Phase' roundtables
- Mandate and tasks:
 - » Explore community safety and social issues, transportation, housing and homelessness, recreational opportunities
- Supports for participation: translation services (for Assembly and/or focus groups); child-minding and elder care; transportation; an honorarium (as an incentive to participate).