



Memorandum

Date: January 24, 2018
To: Interbranch Steering Committee
From: 3 Square Blocks
Re: Town Center Vision – Interview Outcomes Summary

Introduction

As part of the \$54 billion Sound Transit 3 package, Sound Transit will plan and build a bus rapid transit (BRT) system in Lake Forest Park, better connecting the City to the region. It will include a stop at Town Center, 25 blocks of sidewalks along SR 522, and a park-and-ride garage likely in the vicinity of Town Center. This investment presents an opportunity for the Lake Forest Park community to shape the long-term vision for the heart of the City.

The City has made important changes in its approach to the Town Center Plan, including narrowing the project's geographic scope and putting a greater emphasis on public engagement. The City and its Consultant Team began learning about the community's vision for its future by holding a series of interviews in December 2017 and January 2018. The information gathered in these interviews will inform future outreach, including Community Meetings, a workshop series, and a public open house. The results of these outreach events will inform the Town Center Vision, which will aim to capture the community's long term interests and serve as a framework to help the City Council develop policies regarding land use, zoning, and connections within Town Center.

Interviewees included representatives from a number of Lake Forest Park neighborhoods and organizations. Of 12 individuals contacted, 10 responded and were interviewed by phone by 3 Square Blocks. Highlights gathered from the interviews are noted below and organized by question.

Question 1: *What aspects of Town Center do you currently use?*

Among interviewees, the most popular destinations at Town Center were Third Place Books and Third Place Commons. Other popular destinations included Ace Hardware and various restaurants and food shops (including Subway, LFP Bar & Grill, Swirl, Honey Bear Bakery, and Starbucks). Some interviewees cited other reasons for visiting Town Center, including parking, banking, City Hall, doctors' and dentists' offices, the library, Planet Fitness, Mud Bay, Rite Aid, and Albertson's, Great Harvest Bread Co., and

Trading Tigers.

Question 2: *What neighborhood do you live in?*

Interviewees represented a variety of neighborhoods, including Sheridan Heights, Southern Gateway, South Lake Forest Park, Brookside Triangle, the Hillside area, “outside the Brookside area on 182nd,” and “Northwest of Town Center.”

Question 3: *How do you get to Town Center? (i.e. walk, bike, take transit, drive)*

Half of interviewees typically walk to Town Center while the other half primarily drive.

Question 4: *Would you prefer to get to Town Center by a different mode if the option were available? If so, how would you prefer to get to there?*

Interviewees who expressed interest in getting to Town Center by a different mode suggested the following:

- An electric jitney service
- Improved bus service on SR 522
- Improved east-west bus service
- Safer pedestrian infrastructure, specifically
 - Along 39th Place NE
 - From the Horizon View neighborhood
 - Between Whispering Willow Park and Starbucks
 - At crossing between Town Center and Chase Bank (Figure 1)



Figure 1

One interviewee responded that he/she would not use an alternate mode to get to Town Center because he/she typically stops at Town Center on the way to a second destination.

Question 5: *What about Town Center is working / what would you like to see stay the same?*

Nearly all interviewees stated that Third Place Commons was the most successful element of Town Center, citing its programming (speakers in particular), diversity of ages, kid-friendliness, and opportunities for gathering and connecting with the community as reasons for its success. Respondents also felt that the relationship of Honey Bear Bakery and Third Place Books to the Commons contributed to the success of all three destinations.

Other elements of Town Center that interviewees felt are “working” include the library, Farmers Market, Planet Fitness, Gallery at Town Center, and select retail (Ace Hardware, MOD Pizza, and Mud Bay). The site’s orientation, size, and proximity to Lyon Creek are also perceived as assets and opportunities.

Question 6: *What problems do you perceive at Town Center / what would you like to see change?*

Interviewees were primarily interested in changes to retail and services at Town Center. There was a strong desire to transform Town Center into a “one stop shop” through the addition of retail options that would better serve residents’ everyday needs. Interviewees explained that the Albertsons and Ross stores in particular did not serve their needs and were unpleasant to visit. There was also an interest in additional restaurants—a brewpub in particular—and other destinations for younger adults (McMenamin’s in Bothell was cited as an example).

Several interviewees were interested in a shift to multistory mixed use development at Town Center, citing Juanita Village in Kirkland as an example. One interviewee expressed interest in several stories of mixed income housing over retail at the ground floor.

While most interviewees felt the programming was successful at Third Place Commons, some expressed a desire for a better facility for that programming. One respondent commented that the stage at the Commons is an underutilized amenity that could be better programmed for public gathering and performing arts outside of Seattle, and another respondent noted that acoustics in Third Place Commons could be improved.

Interviewees suggested creating an outdoor gathering space (including seating, a play area, fences, and landscaping) at Town Center and adding outdoor seating near MOD Pizza. Another expressed an interest in an “environmentally sound” development that aligns with Lake Forest Park’s values.

Several interviewees would like to see the development at Town Center better integrated with the natural environment. It was suggested that this be accomplished by adding trees, views of and access to Lyon Creek, and access to Lake Washington and nearby parks.

In addition to changes to Town Center itself, interviewees commented that improved pedestrian access to the site and easier connection to the Burke-Gilman Trail would be valuable.

Question 7: *Did you participate in the first workshop? What did you think?*

Interviewees who participated in the workshop on October 11, 2017 shared the following observations about the event:

- Questions asked of the participants felt leading
- The agenda and information presented were unclear
- Some participants felt as though decisions had already been made
- The presenter appeared unprofessional
- There were miscommunications about 1) whether restrictions in the Central Subarea (Town Center) would affect surrounding neighborhoods, and 2) whether there were other viable places to locate the Sound Transit park-and-ride garage
- A lot of useful comments were made
- The meeting has since sparked productive conversations

Question 8: Do you have any advice about moving forward with community participation? What's most effective from your perspective?

Interviewees made the following suggestions for future outreach:

- Meet with the community in person whenever possible
- Communicate better in advance of facing the public
- Hold smaller meetings and workshops to facilitate distillation of public commentary
- Reach out to community members individually (as with these interviews) and in focus groups
- Bring a diverse cross-section of the community together (“World Café”-style) to discuss what they love about Town Center, challenges they perceive, and their envision for the future
- Include outreach activities for school-aged children
- Host events in venues with adequate space for large groups
- Host an Open Space Forum (Jim Diers’ work in Columbia City was cited as an example)
- Approach people in opposition groups before public meetings occur
- Communicate visually, particularly about the park-and-ride garage, to convey design possibilities and scale
- Reframe the conversation by
 - Emphasizing shared values
 - Instilling a broad sense of ownership of the project in community members (as opposed to individuals feeling responsible exclusively for their own property)
 - Using language from the Legacy Plan to prompt visioning conversations
- Acknowledge the community’s major concerns, including
 - The project’s effect on property values
 - The City’s previous unsuccessful attempt to plan to Town Center’s redevelopment (i.e. what’s different about this effort? Is it going to come to fruition?)
 - The long time horizon of the project (some community members would prefer to support a project with a 5-10 year horizon)
- Increase transparency by
 - Making more information easy to find online
 - Being clear about what is already planned and what is still uncertain
 - Studying the remodeling of Burke-Gilman Trail as an example of a transparent project
 - Provide adequate background and context at public events, particularly regarding the history of past efforts and reasons for pursuing this project now (i.e. do not assume all residents are knowledgeable)
- Change the tone of the project by
 - Maintaining a positive outlook in activities and presentations
 - Increasing professionalism at public meetings

The full list of interview questions is included in Attachment A. To protect the anonymity of interviewees, the answers to questions 9-12 are not included in this summary.

Attachment A

Interview Questions

1. What aspects of Town Center do you currently use?
2. What neighborhood do you live in?
3. How do you get to Town Center? (i.e. walk, bike, take transit, drive)
4. Would you prefer to get to Town Center by a different mode if the option were available? If so, how would you prefer to get to there?
5. What about Town Center is working / what would you like to see stay the same?
6. What problems do you perceive at Town Center / what would you like to see change?
7. Did you participate in the first workshop? What did you think?
8. Do you have any advice about moving forward with community participation? What's most effective from your perspective?
9. In your opinion, what other key stakeholders should we consult about the project?
10. We're planning a workshop in February—is that an event you'd like to participate in?
11. Do you use NextDoor?
12. Are you willing to communicate about the project with your broader neighborhood community on Next Door?