



memo portland

to **Brian Martin and Mary Phillips, City of Gresham**
from **Jon Pheanis, MIG**
re **Civic Neighborhood Focus Group Interview Summary**
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On September 15, 2016, the City of Gresham and MIG (the planning team) held a series of informational focus group interviews to help inform the Civic Neighborhood Vision Update. As identified in the project's Public Engagement Plan, the discussions will allow the planning team to gain perspectives from stakeholders with a specific interest in Civic Neighborhood. The City of Gresham coordinated invitations and scheduling for the four focus group meetings all held at City Hall.

The planning team organized the discussions around a similar set of questions intended to understand challenges, opportunities and desired outcomes for the future of Civic Neighborhood. The planning team will use findings from this summary, along with input gathered from the public workshops and surveys, to inform the vision update.

Focus Groups

- Government Agency Representatives
- Neighborhood Representatives
- Business Representatives
- Education Representatives

Key Findings

The following key findings emerged from the discussions.

- **Creating a unique identity:** Several participants indicated that the neighborhood currently lacks a common identify or character that makes it distinguishable from other places as a single and cohesive neighborhood. Participants expressed a need for a logical organization of land uses in Civic (commercial, office, civic, residential and public uses). This included a need for streets, buildings and neighborhood entryways that are inviting, have visual interest and encourage visitors to stay, shop and explore.
- **Making authentic places and designs:** Participants noted that several existing buildings, street designs and public spaces are uninspiring or don't appear to have a specific purpose or well-defined intent. Some participants indicated that

the location of future uses may depend on surrounding conditions, such as whether they are on a busy street, on the edge of Civic or in the more walkable interior where there are pockets of parks and housing.

- **Complementing Downtown Gresham:** Participants indicated that Civic should be different from and complement Downtown. There was also an identified need to provide a clear connection that better links Downtown Gresham and Civic. Another issue addressed was to not create competition between these two areas. One participant noted that current uses in Civic cater to franchise or chain establishments, while Downtown has more independent, “mom and pop” businesses.
- **Creating more efficient connections within Civic:** Participants noted the good pedestrian connections within Civic and specifically identified the MAX line and stations and Wy’East Way Path as major assets. Others noted that there is also a perception that some uses appear too far from one another. There was also an interest in improving or adding a MAX crossing and providing a new east-west connection through Civic, as well as updating street requirements to allow for design flexibility.
- **Integrating public spaces:** Participants discussed the need for improved public spaces where people are encouraged to gather. This included the need to provide multi-generational spaces; places for families and children; and areas for large and small gatherings and formal and informal events.
- **Improving the streetscape:** Improved streets and streetfronts (the public and private space between the street edge and building façade) was another common topic, with participants indicating that existing streets should be improved to create a more pleasant walking experience, while integrating nature and green space.
- **Addressing the needs of young adults and small businesses:** Participants indicated that the neighborhood should do more to attract and retain young adults (generally between the ages of 20-39) that comprise a large and growing segment of the population. This includes providing alternative flex-space offices, as well as smaller leasable spaces to start or grow a business.
- **Maximizing existing uses:** Several participants identified certain uses that already function well or that need change within Civic. Participants noted that medical and education-based businesses in Civic are doing well and should continue to be part of the future. Some said attention should be focused on redeveloping the Kmart site, as well as leveraging/retaining the good visibility for commercial uses along busy streets, which are Burnside, Eastman and Division.
- **Providing housing options:** Participants noted that new housing should continue to be part of the future of Civic Neighborhood. This should include different options and choices that are oriented more towards urban living (live/work units, condominiums and attached housing), featuring convenient access to amenities and services.
- **Attracting quality retail and shopping:** Participants noted that some establishments (such as Starbucks) are seen as a neighborhood gathering place and that Civic has convenient shopping. There was also an expressed need for

food and grocery stores, as well as a destination store that could 'anchor' other businesses.

- **Making better use of parking:** Participants discussed the importance of parking. Businesses, customers and employees rely on adequate parking. However, there was also an identified need to redesign or redevelop large surface parking areas that appear underused or limit the potential of Civic.