



Community Meeting Notes - August 26

Tacoma Mall Neighborhood Subarea Plan

09/28/15

INTRODUCTION

The City of Tacoma held a community meeting about the Tacoma Mall Subarea Plan on August 26, 2015 at the Madison Elementary School Complex. This was the first major opportunity for community members to help plan the future of the Tacoma Mall Neighborhood and to learn about and participate in the planning and environmental review process for the subarea plan. Over fifty people attended.

The meeting began with an open house where participants had the opportunity to review displays with information about the Tacoma Mall Subarea Plan planning process and to discuss questions and comments with City staff and members of the consultant team. The open house was followed by a short presentation and question and answer period. The remainder of the meeting was spent in facilitated group discussion. Participants split into groups to complete two exercises consisting of a series of questions. The first exercise was focused on the current character of the Tacoma Mall Neighborhood. The second exercise was focused on what people hoped the neighborhood would be like in the future. At the end of the meeting, participants came together and reported the highlights from their group discussions.

The following pages include a summary of key themes heard during the meeting, notes from the group exercises and notes on other comments made during the meeting.

Tacoma Mall Subarea Plan

The subarea plan will guide positive growth and change within the Tacoma Mall neighborhood. The City is planning for roughly 8,100 new residents and 7,600 new jobs in the neighborhood by 2040, and as part of the planning process the City is reaching out to community members to ask for input on the best way for this growth to occur. The planning process will also identify environmental impacts and target mitigation measures and implementation steps to achieve the plan's vision.



KEY THEMES

Certain issues were raised repeatedly by multiple participants over the course of the meeting. These were identified as key themes and are listed below.

- **Lack of Identity:** there is no cohesive identity or sense of place for the neighborhood
- **Safety:** crime is a significant challenge for the community
- **Transportation Infrastructure:** all aspects of transportation infrastructure need improvement
- **Parks & Open Space:** there are not enough parks and green spaces
- **Grocery Store:** having a neighborhood grocery store would make a big difference in quality of life for residents

EXERCISE NOTES

EXERCISE #1: TELL US ABOUT THE AREA TODAY

Question 1-A: How do you refer to this area?

Participants did not feel there is a clear identity or sense of place for the Tacoma Mall Subarea. They mentioned a number of different names used to refer to areas in and around the subarea, some of which had historical references. The names included: Tacoma Mall Area, West of the Mall/West Mall, 38th Street, Pine Street, Barlow Bluff, Madison Heights, Edison Outlook, Cascadia Heights, Cascade Park, the Oaks and Precinct 29-603. Participants discussed the need

to give the area an identity and to establish neighborhood pride and a sense of belonging for both businesses and residents.

Question 1-B: What do you consider to be its center?

Most participants felt there was no clear center of the Tacoma Mall Subarea. Others felt there was a center but they identified different locations such as the Tacoma Mall, the West Mall neighborhood, the intersection of S 38th St and Pine St, and the Police Headquarters building. Some participants stated that the boundaries of the subarea did not reflect what they consider to be the Tacoma Mall Neighborhood and that they viewed residential areas south of the mall to be part of the neighborhood. Other participants pointed out that S 38th St divides the Tacoma Mall Subarea and makes it difficult to think of the entire area as a neighborhood.

Question 1-C: Is there a facility or place in the neighborhood that is critical to you?

In general, participants didn't feel there were many key facilities or places in the Tacoma Mall Subarea that were critical to them. Some felt there were none. A few places that were mentioned included Marlene's Market, the post office, the police station, the Tacoma Mall, the Petco store and the West Mall neighborhood with its single family residential houses. Other people said their homes were the places in the neighborhood that were critical to them.

When asked whether they felt the Madison School was a critical facility, participants said that it had the potential to be but was not currently for a number of reasons. These reasons included the fact that it is not currently in use as an elementary school, that there is limited public access and that it is in need of improvements.

Participants also identified a few facilities near the Tacoma Mall Subarea they consider to be important. These include the STAR Center and the Water Flume Trail. The STAR Center is home to a new Boys and Girls Club facility –when this opened the old Boys and Girls Club facility that served the Tacoma Mall Neighborhood closed. Participants stated that this was a major loss for the neighborhood.

Question 1-D: What are the neighborhood's defining features today?

Participants felt the Tacoma Mall Subarea is defined by both positive and negative features. Positive features included cottages in the Lincoln Heights Neighborhood, the post office, the Tacoma Mall, transit access and access to amenities such as retail shops and restaurants. Negative features included unattractive apartments, poor parking conditions, streets and sidewalks.

Question 1-E: What brought you to live, work or invest in the neighborhood?

Affordability was the reason most participants moved to the neighborhood. Other reasons included proximity to Joint Base Lewis McChord, proximity to the Tacoma Mall and being in a central location. A few participants stated that when they moved to the area it was a pleasant single family neighborhood with lots of families and children centered around the Madison School, but that the neighborhood no longer has this character.

Question 1-F: Would you encourage your family and friends to live here? Why or why not?

Most participants said they would not encourage their family and friends to live in the area. They said the area feels unsafe due to criminal activity related to gang and drug issues. It is not family friendly due to criminal influences, lack of safe places for kids to play and lack of choice in schools. The area has poor transportation infrastructure, including lack of parking facilities, potholes in the streets, disconnected sidewalks and no bike facilities. This situation is made worse by high levels of traffic and speeding cars. Other reasons included the lack of parks, lack of a local grocery store and the fact that the area is losing its single family character.

Participants did identify some positive features of the Tacoma Mall Subarea. They did not feel these outweighed the negatives but felt that these features could be strengthened as part of the subarea plan. Positive features included access to amenities, transit access, freeway access, being a short travel distance from most places in Tacoma, and the fact that homes are affordable and a good value compared to other parts of the City.

Question 1-F: Rank your top 3 neighborhood services and retail.

Each of the two discussion groups ranked 25 different types of neighborhood services and retail. The top ranking three from the first group were parks and open spaces, a recreation facility and a retail food market. The second group also ranked parks and open spaces and a retail food market in their top three; their other top three ranking item was a public school.

During the ranking discussion participants mentioned specific service and retail locations that were important to them in the Tacoma Mall Subarea. These included the post office, Costco, Marlene's, the Tacoma Mall, the police station, the Madison School, Weight Watchers, Petco, REI, Taco Time and restaurants in general. Participants also brainstormed a few new services and retail facilities they would like to see, such as a brewery and a senior center.

EXERCISE #2: TELL US YOUR HOPES FOR THE FUTURE

Question 2-A: Thinking ahead 20 years — what would you want to have in the neighborhood in order to stay here?

Participants identified a number of neighborhood features they would want to see in order to remain in the area. They did not prioritize between them. Ideas included more parks and green spaces (including safe places for kids to play), improved public safety (for instance through a greater police presence and improved lighting for walking paths), better transportation facilities and services (including an improved sidewalk network, a pedestrian connection to the Water Flume Trail, bike facilities, improved paving conditions, more parking options such as garages, traffic calming measures, traffic signage and enforcement, and increased access to public transportation), new public services and facilities (i.e. library, grocery store, food bank, youth programming), affordable and environmentally friendly housing options, and access to higher paying jobs. There was discussion around the idea that higher paying jobs in the area could help

lead to a reduction in crime and improvements in the pedestrian environment and the market conditions for local businesses.



Question 2-B: What would you like to see change?

Many of the ideas that were discussed under the first question in Exercise 2 were voiced again. New ideas that were brought up included helping to keep parents out of jail, reserving space in condos and apartment buildings for community use, creating high quality public spaces, transitioning vacant and underutilized buildings to small scale local retail such as boutiques and restaurants, and developing a brand and a contiguous look and feel for the neighborhood. Some participants also felt that there should be fewer apartments and more condos and that subsidized housing should be removed. Other participants asked if it would be possible for incentives to be provided for remaining single family dwellings to make improvements and comply with new neighborhood standards established through the subarea plan.

Question 2-C: What is your highest priority?

Reducing crime appeared to be the most widely shared priority among participants. Other participant priorities included improving transportation facilities, getting a local grocery store, creating a healthy neighborhood, preserving single family neighborhoods and protecting the environment.

Question 2-D: What changes would help businesses to grow and serve the neighborhood and City?

Participants shared ideas for helping businesses to grow. Many ideas related to improving transportation access to businesses such as improving pedestrian access, improving traffic

safety, providing better transit access and providing more parking options. Other ideas included making it easy for new businesses to get started in the area, and providing increased mixed-income housing opportunity.

Question 2-E: What would be needed to create a complete community here?

Many of the ideas that were discussed under the first two questions in Exercise 2 were voiced again. Participant suggestions for neighborhood attributes that would help to create a complete community included: parks, sidewalks, crosswalks, co-housing development, home ownership opportunities, community programs, a frozen yogurt or ice cream shop, a doughnut and coffee shop, a YMCA with a pool, a pharmacy, an affordable grocery store, a food bank, an all season farmers market, a neighborhood school and a senior center. Additional ideas included using the Madison School as community center, taking down gates and fences around the community, and reducing crime. Participants also suggested looking at examples of other successful communities such as the Proctor District, 6th Ave, Kent Station and the Junction in Seattle.



OTHER COMMENTS

Participant comments shared during the meeting that were not part of the exercise discussions are listed below:

- Concern that new population growth would bring problems to the neighborhood, as it has in the past
- Questions about the EIS scoping process and schedule
- Questions about how redevelopment of the area be funded
- Questions about whether the City will consider preserving some single family areas

- Discussion of the fact that there are Federal facilities in the area that have development restrictions
- Discussion about how to protect and enhance the South Tacoma aquifer