

## **Tacoma Mall Regional Growth Center: Neighborhood Livability Needs Assessment Executive Summary**

### **Introduction**

In support of City's Tacoma Mall Subarea Planning initiative, Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department has hosted three focus group community conversations. The Health Department retained a local community outreach consultant, NW Sound Consulting, to employ non-traditional means of community outreach, such as door-to-door outreach to individual homes, townhouse and apartment units, and local business owners, to invite local residents to join in the community conversations.

### **Purpose**

Health starts where we live, work and play. The Health Department partners with the City to hear the voices of the local residents as to what they need in their neighborhood in order to live happier and healthier. The purpose of these community conversations is to identify local needs, concerns and aspirations to improve neighborhood livability.

Three focus groups were held on July 8, Aug 4 and Aug 6, 2015 at three convenient locations with easy access to populations living in different parts of the Tacoma Mall area.

### **Major Needs Assessment Findings**

The following five recurring themes were what we heard from community members:

- Neighborhood Safety –Partly attributed to the high residential vacancies, limited places for youth to go, and limited access to needed resources.
- Parking, Speeding and Traffic –This safety issue is exacerbated as a result of poor signage (speed, children, disabled, etc.) in the community. This is a safety and injury threat to children playing in or near the streets, in lack of parks facilities. The current limited number and the poor condition of on-street parking have challenged property and human safety.
- Walkability and Alternative Transportation – Disjointed, incomplete, poorly maintained, non ADA-compliant and the lack of sidewalks make walking and navigating with strollers very difficult. While shuttle services provide great support, the overall level of bus service was inadequate to connect with employment centers.
- Parks and Public Amenities for Youth and Children – There's a lack of safe places for children and youth to recreate. The Lincoln Heights area west of S. Steeles St., which creates a barrier to safely access Lincoln Heights Park, has no play structure for children. The lack of appropriate places for youth and young adults to gather and recreate has created multiple problems in the community.
- Access to Healthy Food – Besides Marlene's (which is almost unaffordable to local residents), there's no easy access to affordable healthy food options where people can walk, bike or bus to. There are no food banks or other food sources within reasonable walking distance.

Other concerns include property encroachment, lack of neighborhood cohesion given gated areas, compatibility between various types of housing, and fast turn-over of apartment residents.

## Recommendations

1. Improve neighborhood safety—Work with local community organizations, such as Safe Streets and local churches, property managers, and local law enforcement to explore public safety measures.
2. Traffic calming and mobility improvements—Consider traffic calming strategies, add signs, improve infrastructure for mobility; such as complete streets or sidewalks, connect sidewalks with essential public services, and improve on-street parking.
3. Work with Pierce Transit to improve bus level of service to connect people from home to work.
4. Create active places for youth and young adults—Work with Metro Parks, Boys and Girls Club, churches, or the private sector to create recreation facilities in this area; such as swimming pool, basketball court, skate park (suggested site off of Tyler St. to cap “contaminated soil”). Partner with public and non-profit agencies to bring in role models for youth.
5. Increase affordable food access—Incentivize the provision of a full-service grocery store in the area, food banks, an all-season farmer’s market, better management and care of the community garden.
6. Maintain affordability—Ensure sufficient affordable and adequate housing for families of different incomes, and consider housing diversification and intensification, such as cluster housing, etc.
7. Create public places to foster a sense of neighborhood—Create vibrant public spaces for people to gather. Make public sidewalks a place-making opportunity.
8. Create complete neighborhoods by adding needed facilities and services—Provide personal/ neighborhood services, parks and amenities within reasonable walking distance, such as medical clinics, community services, salons, coffee shops, playgrounds, trails, dog parks and street trees.
9. Continue to work closely with the community and create effective means of communication between the community and public agencies. Continuously communicate with community members as to how their needs are being addressed.
10. Build community capacity to sustain continuous discussions throughout the planning process.
11. Work with Safe Streets and the Neighborhood Council to identify key local leaders to serve as the bridge between City Hall and the local residents.
12. Expand the stakeholders’ committee to include:
  - Two to three key local residents representing various quadrants of the Mall
  - Law enforcement
  - Support agencies, such as local churches and medical services
  - Food Systems Opportunities (Food Banks, Grocery Stores)
  - Boys and Girls Clubs
  - Safe Streets
13. Engage the wider community to further discuss naming opportunities for distinct neighborhoods within the Mall area. Consider the history and heritage of the area to provide a continuous sense of identity. Some suggestions for further exploration include:
  - Vintage Park or Vintage Paradise
  - South Tacoma Crest
  - Village Gardens
  - Old Cascadia
14. Continue to work closely with the Health Department to address the social determinants of health.
15. Partner closely with City’s Equity and Human Rights Office to address the determinants of equity.