

Culver City Community Conversation Report from the November 29th and December 1st Conversations

Overview

The City of Culver City, California and the National Institute for Civil Discourse (NICD) collaborated during 2018 to hold two community meetings focused on Fox Hills, a historically underrepresented, diverse, and densely-populated neighborhood facing pressure to grow. This project is a part of NICD's Revive Civility and Respect Cities initiative which seeks to enhance the engagement between citizens and elected officials and to use civil discourse to address a specific community issue. Culver City was selected to participate in this effort as one of just five municipalities from around the country based on the City's commitment to changing the way it interacts with residents.

The objectives of the Community Conversations are to hold a three-hour meeting of Culver City residents, businesses, and other community stakeholders to -

- introduce civil discourse concepts and practice these skills;
- identify what residents value most about being a part of the Fox Hills community;
- identify and prioritize areas of concern and opportunity to be addressed for future planning; and
- identify ways to improve communications within the Fox Hills community and between the City and Fox Hills.

The outcome of the conversation is to begin to identify a shared vision for Fox Hills to be used as part of planning for the future of the community.

Community Conversations were held twice – on the evening of Thursday, November 29th and the morning of Saturday, December 1st – covering the same content, to provide greater opportunity for residents to participate. The conversations featured small group dialogue where six to eight participants worked together to discuss specific issues and identify areas of agreement. Each small group discussion was led by a neutral volunteer table facilitator who helped keep the group on task, ensured that everyone had a chance to participate, and helped capture feedback from the group. Each group had a laptop computer that was used to record participant feedback from the conversations – a team of three (Hala Harik Hayes of NICD and Ashley Hefner and Elaine Gerety-Warner of the City) reviewed the input and quickly identified a short list of ideas or themes heard repeatedly from the conversations. These themes were shared back with participants who used their mobile phones to vote for the most important themes, providing real time feedback on their priorities.

Summer and Fall 2018

In May and June 2018, NICD conducted interviews with nine Fox Hills stakeholders to learn more about community concerns. We issued a report from the interviews and used the input to drive the project approach and identify the challenges facing the community that were discussed during the Culver City Community Conversations.

From these interviews, a handful of key themes emerged:

- the City should invest in efforts to rebuild trust with Fox Hills' residents;
- there is a perception that Culver City treats Fox Hills like a less important neighborhood;
- Fox Hills residents are not as civically engaged as other neighborhoods in Culver City, perhaps due to the perception that they don't have a seat at the table;

- residents are not opposed to changes in the neighborhood, but they would like future development to safeguard and preserve the uniqueness of the neighborhood; and
- the greatest challenges facing Fox Hills identified by stakeholders are: transportation and mobility; finding balance between new development and quality of life; communication – both inside the neighborhood and between the neighborhood and the City; preserving the culture and uniqueness of the community; attracting greater amenities; and better syncing neighborhood needs with City goals.

Feedback from the interviews also led to the development of the Culver City Community Conversation Advisory Board, comprised of 14 community stakeholders (Albert Vera, Alissa King, Colin Diaz, Deborah Wallace, Diana Hernandez, Dave Saeta, Freddy Puza, Judi Sherman, Manjit Asrani, Michael Cho, Nelson Algaze, Renee Bayley, Will Rickards, and Summer McBride). The Advisory Board met four times and provided support and advice on messaging, outreach, discussion topics and questions, demographic questions, Fox Hills history, and follow-up activities.

Summary from the November 29th Conversation

During the first Community Conversation, 32 residents and stakeholders met at Playa Studios to plan for the future of Fox Hills. The workshop featured an introductory conversation on what residents value most about being a part of the Fox Hills community and a brief overview of civil discourse concepts with encouragement to practice these skills during the conversation. Three substantive conversations followed on: 1) the top characteristics of Fox Hills to preserve for future generations and steps the City and steps the community can take to enhance these characteristics; 2) articulating residents’ vision for the future of Fox Hills and steps to take to achieve the vision; and 3) improving the way Fox Hills communicates internally and between the neighborhood and the City. Following the workshops, feedback was synthesized to provide this snapshot of the conversation themes and priorities.

Who Attended?

1. What is your connection to the community?
 - 42% I live here and own my home
 - 2% I live here and rent my home
 - 2% I own property here (but don’t live here)
 - 13% I work here
 - 13% I own a business here
 - 27% I am connected in a different way
2. How long have you been a part of the community?
 - 11% Less than two years
 - 14% 2-5 years
 - 11% 6-10 years
 - 38% 11-20 years
 - 3% 21-30 years
 - 14% 31-40 years
 - 11% more than 40 years
3. What is your age?
 - 0% 18 and under
 - 0% age 19-24
 - 13% age 25-34
 - 26% age 35-44
 - 24% age 45-54
 - 21% age 55-64
 - 16% age 65 and better
4. What is your race/ethnicity?
 - 16% African American/Black
 - 8% Asian/Pacific Islander/Hawaiian
 - 3% Latino/Hispanic
 - 0% Native American/Alaskan Native
 - 61% White/European American (not Hispanic/Latino)
 - 0% Some other race or ethnic group
 - 13% More than one race/ethnic group

- 5. What is your gender identity?
 - 64% man
 - 36% woman
 - 0% Other (e.g. non-binary)
- 6. What is your current employment status?
 - 22% Employed (or self-employed) in Fox Hills
 - 67% Employed (or self-employed) outside Fox Hills
 - 0% Unemployed
 - 0% Student
 - 11% Retired
 - 0% Other

Themes from the Table Discussion: What We Value the Most About Fox Hills

- Diversity
- Small town feeling / community
- Access to outdoors / parks
- Affordability
- Small business/ retail development
- Central location/ close to everything
- Family friendly
- Peaceful/ serene environment

Themes from the Table Discussion: Characteristics to Preserve for Future Generations

After reviewing the themes from the conversation, participants selected their top two choices for the characteristics of Fox Hills they would like to preserve for future generations. The themes have been ordered below to show factors from highest to lowest vote getters based on total number of votes.

- 27% Walkability/ mobility access and multi-generational
- 23% Balanced retail that fits the neighborhood
- 13% Affordability
- 13% Quaint/ quiet/beauty
- 11% Safety
- 7% Strong community/ small-town feel
- 7% Community identity/ diversity

Themes from the Table Discussion: Preserve & Enhance Fox Hills - Steps the City Can Take

- Maintain, expand/ invest in parks
- Increase access to parks
- Maintain density and zoning limits
- Encourage alternate modes of transportation

Themes from the Table Discussion: Preserve & Enhance Fox Hills – Steps the Community Can Take

- Active participation of the community
- Advocate and organize
- Residents continue to speak up
- Dialogue with each other
- Participate in neighborhood watch to promote safety

Themes from the Table Discussion: Our Vision for Fox Hills – What We See in 15 Years

- Neighborhood businesses (grocery, services, small scale)
- Family activities/ cultural events/ public art
- More green space (walkways/ recreation)
- Multi-mobility options
- More/ efficient parking
- Expand workforce housing/ home ownership
- Maintain current housing levels

Themes from the Table Discussion: Our Vision for Fox Hills – How to Get There

After reviewing the themes from the conversation, participants selected their top two choices for steps that can be taken to get us to our vision of Fox Hills in 15 years. The themes have been ordered below to show factors from highest to lowest vote getters based on total number of votes.

- 36% Better communication/ dialogue/ accountability between community, city & developers
- 32% Develop more public transit options/ transportation improvements (ex. shuttle)
- 24% Greater transparency between community, city, and developers
- 8% Expand City's sustainability/ eco-friendly programs in the community

Themes from the Table Discussion: How to Improve Communication Between the City and Fox Hills

After reviewing the themes from the conversation, participants selected their top two choices for what can be done to improve communication between the City and Fox Hills. The themes have been ordered below to show factors from highest to lowest vote getters based on total number of votes.

- 41% Bring City Council to Fox Hills (community/ HOA/ Council meetings, coffees)
- 20% Additional advertising of meetings (banners, text messages, expanded distribution)
- 16% Central gathering space/ meeting location
- 14% Provide virtual participation to city meetings
- 9% Promote awareness of government operations/ process

Summary from the December 1st Conversation

48 residents and stakeholders participated in the Saturday morning Conversation held at Veterans Memorial Auditorium, which covered the same discussion topics as the November 29th Conversation. Following the workshops, feedback was synthesized into this report.

Who Attended?

1. What is your connection to the community?
 - 42% I live here and own my home
 - 12% I live here and rent my home
 - 2% I own property here (but don't live here)
 - 17% I work here
 - 8% I own a business here
 - 19% I am connected in a different way
2. How long have you been a part of the community?
 - 16% Less than two years
 - 16% 2-5 years
 - 11% 6-10 years
 - 32% 11-20 years
 - 16% 21-30 years
 - 3% 31-40 years
 - 5% more than 40 years
3. What is your age?
 - 0% 18 and under
 - 3% age 19-24
 - 23% age 25-34
 - 18% age 35-44
 - 15% age 45-54
 - 26% age 55-64
 - 15% age 65 and better
4. What is your race/ethnicity?
 - 15% African American/Black
 - 15% Asian/Pacific Islander/Hawaiian
 - 0% Latino/Hispanic
 - 0% Native American/Alaskan Native
 - 62% White/European American (not Hispanic/Latino)
 - 3% Some other race or ethnic group
 - 5% More than one race/ethnic group
5. What is your gender identity?
 - 36% Man
 - 64% Woman
 - 0% Other (e.g. non-binary)
6. What is your current employment status?
 - 13% Employed (or self-employed) in Fox Hills
 - 67% Employed (or self-employed) outside Fox Hills
 - 0% Unemployed
 - 0% Student
 - 10% Retired
 - 10% Other

Themes from the Table Discussion: What We Value the Most About Fox Hills

- Open space, greenery, trees, parks
- Sense of community, welcoming neighborhood
- Peaceful, quaint, quiet, serene
- Diversity, multiculturalism
- Safe, low crime
- Central location, proximity to amenities
- Walkability
- Plaza, access to retail
- Access to good quality schools
- Value current density

Themes from the Table Discussion: Characteristics to Preserve for Future Generations

After reviewing the themes from the conversation, participants selected their top three choices for the characteristics of Fox Hills they would like to preserve for future generations. The themes have been ordered below to show factors from highest to lowest vote getters based on total number of votes.

- 26% Open space, green space, parks
- 19% Sense of community, small town
- 14% Diversity in race, age, opinion, etc.
- 11% Sense of safety, low crime rate
- 10% Reduce/ better traffic flow
- 7% Minority owned, small businesses
- 6% Existing density levels
- 6% Peacefulness, serenity
- 1% More parking

Themes from the Table Discussion: Preserve & Enhance Fox Hills - Steps the City Can Take

- Provide more green space, parks
- Bring more events to Fox Hills
- Maintain density, no more housing
- Support more affordable housing
- Support more mixed use development and flexible zoning
- Provide better traffic management
- Provide multi-mobility options
- Connect with HOAs, central meeting space

Themes from the Table Discussion: Preserve & Enhance Fox Hills – Steps the Community Can Take

- Report crimes, create neighborhood watches
- Attend more meetings, HOA involvement
- Hold more events and get to know your neighbors
- Advocate for a balance of development and smart growth
- Create open dialogue, encourage active voices

Themes from the Table Discussion: Our Vision for Fox Hills – What We See in 15 Years

- Better sustainable transit options
- Smarter traffic and better flow
- More walkable with pedestrian amenities
- More open and green spaces

- Creation of a main street with more local retail
- Enhanced sustainable infrastructure (solar, recycling, etc.)
- More affordable housing options
- More events like concerts in the park (like Playa Vista)

Themes from the Table Discussion: Our Vision for Fox Hills – How to Get There

After reviewing the themes from the conversation, participants selected their top three choices for steps that can be taken to get us to our vision of Fox Hills in 15 years. The themes have been ordered below to show factors from highest to lowest vote getters based on total number of votes.

- 23% Develop a sustainability/ green plan
- 20% Allow for more walkability/ pedestrian friendly atmosphere
- 13% Encourage spaces to accommodate small, local businesses/ entrepreneurs
- 11% Maintain housing affordability and desirability
- 11% Improve traffic and provide multimodal transit
- 10% Allow for more retail/ restaurants and balance with housing
- 9% Consider affordable/workforce housing
- 4% Be transparent with community on developers and funding

Themes from the Table Discussion: How to Improve Communication Between the City & Fox Hills

After reviewing the themes from the conversation, participants selected their top two choices for what can be done to improve communication between the City and Fox Hills. The themes have been ordered below to show factors from highest to lowest vote getters based on total number of votes.

- 32% City surveys, designated representative for neighborhood on City staff
- 32% City to seek out input early and proactively
- 27% More community participation at Board and Advisory meetings
- 5% Coordinate social media notices
- 3% More input through City website, City responsiveness

Themes from the Table Discussion: How to Improve Communication Within Fox Hills

After reviewing the themes from the conversation, participants selected their top two choices for what can be done to improve communication within Fox Hills. The themes have been ordered below to show factors from highest to lowest vote getters based on total number of votes.

- 27% More community events/ block parties and rotate among different complexes
- 22% More connection between HOAs to share consistent information
- 20% Use digital and social media to connect and inform each other
- 14% Create a community center
- 12% More open meetings and forums like this one
- 6% Outreach to new members/welcome wagons

What Have We Learned?

The participants who attended the November 29th and December 1st Community Conversations represent a small portion of Fox Hills stakeholders. In all, about 100 stakeholders took part in this process – either by agreeing to be interviewed, as members of the Advisory Board, or by participating in the Community Conversations. **Using the demographic data collected during the Conversations, we know that our group was not as representative as the Fox Hills community at large.** For example, 42% of participants in the Community Conversation indicated that they own their home (compared with 44% in actuality), while only 7% reported that they rent (compared with 56% in actuality), illustrating that we did not have balanced representation from renters. We also know that 23% of participants did not live, own property or a business, or work in the community – they indicated that they are connected in a different way. Racial diversity was also an area where our participants differed from the actual diversity of the community – 62% of our participants identified as White (compared with 42% in actuality), 16% of participants identified as Black (compared with 20% in actuality), 12% of participants identified as Asian (compared with 20% in actuality), 2% of participants identified as Latino (compared with 14% in actuality), 9% of participants identified as more than one race (compared with 4% in actuality).

Based on the feedback provided during the introduction and the three major discussion areas, we can paint a picture of what these Fox Hills stakeholders value most and their priorities for the community. The Conversation began with stakeholders introducing themselves around their tables and **identifying what it is they value most about being a part of the Fox Hills community. The following seven attributes of the community emerged as those most valued between the two Conversations:** diversity and multiculturalism; small town feeling/sense of community; access to outdoors, parks and green space; central location that is in close proximity to everything; access to retail and small businesses; family friendly and good quality schools; and peaceful, quiet and serene.

The first policy conversation focused on recognizing the top characteristics of Fox Hills that participants want to preserve for future generations, and then identifying some steps the City and the community can take to enhance these characteristics. **Between the two Conversations, stakeholders identified ten unique characteristics to preserve. Of the ten, these four received the greatest number of votes:** walkability/mobility access that is multigenerational; open space, green space and parks; balanced retail that fits the neighborhood; and a sense of community/small town feel. After identifying the characteristics to preserve, participants weighed-in on steps the City and community can take to accomplish this preservation. **The most commonly heard steps for the City to take include:** expanding investment in and increasing access to parks; encouraging multiple mobility options and alternative modes of transportation; and maintaining current levels of density. **The most commonly heard steps for the community to take include:** actively participating in community affairs; advocating and organizing; creating more opportunities for open dialogue; and participating in neighborhood watch programs.

The second substantive discussion provided an opportunity for stakeholders to articulate their vision for the future of Fox Hills and steps to take to achieve the vision. **Asked what they want to see in Fox Hills in 15 years, the most commonly held ideas across the two conversations were:** more events (family activities, concerts in park, etc.); additional open and green spaces; greater local retail options; more mobility options (increased walkability & sustainable transit); and different and sometimes conflicting ideas on housing (expanded workforce housing and home ownership, more affordable housing, and maintaining, not expanding current housing levels). **When asked how to achieve the 15-year vision for Fox Hills,**

stakeholders selected these steps as most critical to get there: better communication/dialogue/accountability between the community, city & developers; more public transit options/transportation improvements; greater transparency between the community, city, and developers; develop a sustainability/green plan; and allow for a more walkable/pedestrian friendly atmosphere.

The final discussion centered on improving communications between Fox Hills and the City, and how Fox Hills communicates within the neighborhood. **The most popular ideas about improving communication between the City and the neighborhood included:** bring City Council to Fox Hills (community/HOA/Council meetings, coffees); create City surveys and a designated representative for the neighborhood on City staff; City to seek out input early and proactively; and more community participation at Board and Advisory meetings. **Additionally, participants also suggested ideas for improving communication inside the neighborhood.** These ideas included: hold more community events/block parties and rotate among different complexes; more connection between HOAs to share consistent information; use digital and social media to connect and inform each other; and create a community center.

Finally, we have provided recommendations on ways for the community to continue to utilize civil discourse in future public meetings:

- Invite residents to attend public meetings using grassroots methods;
- Make a point of engaging traditionally hard-to-reach populations;
- Provide multiple ways for residents to provide input on issues;
- Consider holding more public meetings at venues in the community;
- Make meetings safe spaces for sharing by including small group, facilitated discussions as possible;
- Identify neutral, experienced facilitators to lead meetings;
- Provide unbiased information on discussion topics so participants are working from the same facts;
- Strive to remove barriers to participation – provide childcare, parking, translation, food, etc.;
- Begin meetings by sharing ground rules, provide space for new rules to emerge, and ask participants for their agreement to follow the ground rules.

What Have We Accomplished?

- We have built a network of residents and stakeholders interested in planning the future of Fox Hills;
- We have had practice using civil discourse principles to hold public meetings;
- We have identified what we value most about Fox Hills, and the characteristics that make us unique that we must preserve for future generations, including some steps for this preservation;
- We have begun to articulate our vision for the future of Fox Hills and steps to achieve this vision;
- We have discussed strategies for improving the way Fox Hills communicates with the City of Culver City, and ways Fox Hills can improve communication within the neighborhood; and
- We have begun to develop a community vision that sets the stage for future planning.

What Comes Next?

This input that was gathered during the two Culver City Community Conversations is the start of a larger process. This feedback serves as one of the major inputs that will be used to shape the Fox Hills portion of the General Plan Update (GPU). City Council selected a consultant team to provide GPU services on January 28, 2019 and the project will begin in the months to follow. The first major phase will be to engage with the community to understand what is envisioned for Culver City's future. For more information, visit:

www.CulverCity.org/GeneralPlan