

Report of Culver City Stakeholder Interviews September 28, 2018

Culver City and the National Institute for Civil Discourse (NICD) are working together to host the Culver City Community Conversation during the Fall of 2018. The Culver City Community Conversation will bring residents together to celebrate the unique characteristics of Fox Hills while developing a shared community vision that will be used to inform the future of the neighborhood.

The first step in this process included interviews with Culver City stakeholders to identify resident's concerns and to inform the process going forward. This report summarizes the findings from the stakeholder interviews.

Stakeholder Interviews

Between May 17, and June 19, 2018, Hala Harik Hayes of NICD conducted telephone interviews with nine Culver City stakeholders to collect their candid feedback about the state of discourse in Culver City. Stakeholders were encouraged to speak candidly; comments shared in this report have been left anonymous intentionally.

Interview Questions

1. How would you describe the role you play in Fox Hills and Culver City? How long have you been a part of the Culver City community?
2. What do you believe is the most challenging issue currently facing Fox Hills? and Culver City generally? We are looking for issues within our control to affect/change.
3. Briefly share an example of how the Fox Hills/Culver City community has dealt with contentious community issues in the past? Was the debate civil? Why or why not?
4. Using the above example, how did Fox Hills/Culver City community members engage with each other? Was it effective? Was it civil?
5. Using the above example, how did Culver City government engage with the Fox Hills community? Was it effective? Was it civil?
6. What does effective community engagement in Fox Hills looks like to you?
7. Moving forward with our effort to engage the community, what pitfalls/challenges do we need to avoid / be aware of?
8. Who needs to be engaged for this to be perceived as a successful and inclusive community visioning process?

Stakeholders Interviewed:

Diana Hernandez
Freddy Puza
Judi Sherman
Laura Stuart
Manjit Asrani
Paula Keating
Pouria Abassi
Renee Bayley
Summer McBride

Summary of Findings

1. How would you describe the role you play in Fox Hills and Culver City? How long have you been a part of the Culver City community?

- 7 of 9 people interviewed identified themselves as residents of Fox Hills.
- In terms of community involvement:
 - 2 interviewees identified themselves as active in the Fox Hills Alliance; and
 - 3 interviewees identified themselves as active in the Fox Hills Neighborhood Association.
- In terms of their housing situation:
 - 2 interviewees identified themselves as renters; and
 - 4 interviewees identified themselves as home owners.
- The length of time they have resided in Culver City or Fox Hills varies:
 - 2 indicated between 2 - 9 years;
 - 2 indicated between 10 - 19 years;
 - 2 indicated between 20-30 years;
 - 2 indicated that they are life-long residents of Culver City

2. What do you believe is the most challenging issue currently facing Fox Hills? and Culver City generally? We are looking for issues within our control to affect/change.

- 7 interviewees indicated that transportation and mobility are the most significant challenges. Parking, traffic, and related infrastructure were all mentioned.
 - “Making sure we get our share of parking, speed bumps, stop signs. We have so many people here and parking is an issue.”
 - “People speed through our community now. How will we handle more people traveling through our city?”
 - “We have been taken by surprise by the changes in mobility, the new generation may not want cars. Maybe we don’t need as many parking spots as we think?”
- 5 interviewees indicated that Fox Hills is struggling to find the correct balance between the need for additional development (commercial & residential) and quality of life.
 - We’re ok with change, but in a “planned and thoughtful way that addresses the needs of the community.”
 - An already high population density combined with a lack of public transit options makes the prospect of more development daunting to residents.
 - “We need housing and I’m all for responsible development. But without enough parking, this is only going to get worse.”
- 3 interviewees indicated that communication is a challenge in Fox Hills.
 - Multi-family dwellings in Fox Hills means that residents live in “bubbles.”
 - “We don’t have one community, we are individual communities of condos.”
 - “It is hard to access people, difficult to engage and communicate with others – including elected officials and candidates seeking office.”
- 3 interviewees indicated that Culver City treats Fox Hills like a less important neighborhood
 - “A lot of people feel separate from Culver City.”
 - “Not having our voices heard – candidates don’t come to Fox Hills, we’re not at the table.”
- 2 interviewees indicated preserving the culture, uniqueness, diversity of the community.
 - “We are a different neighborhood. We have more multi-family residential buildings.”
 - “I love the diversity of the neighborhood, families, seniors, singles – the community wants to preserve the feeling of diversity and stay less commercialized.”
- 2 interviewees indicated that “Fox Hills does not have enough amenities.”
- 2 interviewees indicated that Fox Hills residents sometimes feel that their needs are out of sync with Culver City goals.
 - Culver City wants to be less car dependent, promote walkability, increase bike lanes, and cut carbon emissions, but Fox Hills residents don’t feel like they have good public transit options, don’t feel safe walking/biking, and don’t feel like they are in close enough proximity to walk.

3. Briefly share an example of how the Fox Hills/Culver City community has dealt with contentious community issues in the past? Was it effective? Was it civil? Why or why not?

- 3 interviewees indicated contentious community issues have not been handled effectively.
 - “At the public meeting, most of the people were civil, others used different tactics.”
 - “Residents tried to be civil, but they were met with a lot of resistance and dismissive responses, questions were not answered in a straightforward way.”
 - “The debate was not as civil as it could be, but that fault rests with both parties. They should do a better job of incorporating community input and buy-in. The community could do a better job of being better educated and show more civic involvement. In the beginning it was a lot of yelling, it got better over time.”
- 5 Interviewees indicated contentious community issues have not been handled effectively.
 - “The debate was primarily between different factions of residents.”
 - “There was a lack of respect. There was no debate, we were not engaged.”
 - “The meetings were a circus. One person would stand up make an overarching statement about the neighborhood and everyone would cheer.”
 - “The debate was not civil. They were clearly just trying to check the engagement box.”

4. Using the above example, how did Fox Hills/Culver City community members engage with each other? Was it effective? Was it civil?

- 3 interviewees agreed that the Fox Hills community engaged with each other effectively.
 - “Fox Hills residents were successful because they worked together. Fox Hills was unified in opposition to the development, but there was disagreement about what the opposition would look like. This disagreement was fairly civil.”
 - “Residents united, they were pissed off at the developer. People were angry because we were not being listened to.”
 - “We used grassroots organization and dialogue to come to a sensible solution.”
- 1 interviewee believes that the Fox Hills community engaged with each other ineffectively.
 - “It was ugly, calculated, politics. People are divided and angry. Half the people don’t talk to the other half.”
- 4 interviewees indicated that there may be division between some Fox Hill residents.
 - “There are some fissures in Fox Hills. The Neighborhood Association and the Alliance – The Alliance is more of an activist organization. This became very political.”
 - “There is tension between the groups.”

5. Using the above example, how did Culver City government engage with the Fox Hills community? Was it effective? Was it civil?

- 2 interviewees agreed that the Culver City government engaged with the Fox Hills community effectively.
 - “Always civil.”
 - “After the 2nd meeting, Councilmembers reached out to us.”
- 2 interviewees agreed that the Culver City government engaged with the Fox Hills community ineffectively.
 - “Other than Town Hall meetings – there was not much engagement, it was dismissive and misleading – we could not tell who was for or against the development. The development issue has eroded trust even more.”
 - “Council has mismanaged public meetings, they are afraid of people in the community. City Council has not dealt with community issues well.”
- 5 interviewees had mixed feelings about the way the Culver City government engaged with the Fox Hills community.
 - “City Hall was not always forthcoming, but they seemed to try to engage.”
 - “We were suspicious because this would not have gone this far down the road if the City had not okayed it.”
 - “The majority of Fox Hills residents are not interacting with Culver City government on a regular basis, when they are, they are pushing their own agenda.”
 - “I have high hopes for the new Council going forward.”
 - “Culver City engages when asked by people to engage. If a strong neighborhood association asks for engagement the City will engage, but they don’t necessarily take the initiative. Fox Hills has does not have strong neighborhood associations.”

6. What does effective community engagement in Fox Hills looks like to you?

- What Residents can do:
 - “Attend city council meeting and speak respectfully and intelligently.”
 - “Earlier engagement from the community on issues of concern.”
- What the City can do:
 - “Ask What is working? What do we still need to work on? Build relationships and trust on a one-on-one basis.”
 - “I’d be holding multi-generational meetings everywhere. What do we agree on? How far apart are we on the areas of disagreement?”
 - “Go out and pound the pavement, meet with residents to understand our issues and the structure of our neighborhood. Come to our meetings and events, be visible.”
 - “Make sure there is more and better communication between City Council and residents, and that there is honesty and transparency.”
- What neighborhood organizations can do:
 - “Meet with residents on a regular basis and liaise with the city council.”
 - “Formalize the organization, create a Board, a concrete structure, hold open meetings quarterly, advocate on behalf of the community, take a stand on issues.”

7. Moving forward with our effort to engage the community, what pitfalls/challenges do we need to avoid / be aware of?

- 3 interviewees stressed the importance of presenting more information about NICD and its role in this process:
 - “Build credibility, reach out to community leaders, win them over.”
 - “Explain that we’re trying to help the City amplify the voices of residents, emphasize that NICD has no skin in the game, we’re not with the developer.”
- 2 interviewees focused on outreach challenges:
 - “Need to market to the entire Fox Hills community. There are 23 total complexes and each complex has its own infrastructure.”
 - “How do you begin discourse with people who don’t know about the issues or don’t want to be engaged? How do you engage Fox Hills?”

8. Who needs to be engaged for this to be perceived as a successful and inclusive community visioning process?

- Residents
- Business owners
- Neighborhood organizations (Fox Hills Neighborhood Association, Fox Hills Alliance)
- Social media - Facebook, Next Door, Twitter, CC Calendar, etc.
- Engage more than just the usual people
- Seniors (reach out to the senior center)
- Middle-aged people (40-60 who are still working)
- The City council members
- City managers / City staff
- Both home owners & renters
- People of color
- LGBT community
- Women
- High school students
- 20 somethings
- Homeless
- Millennials
- Condo building leadership/The HOA Boards of different complexes/managers of rental units