

Community Needs Meeting  
November 13, 2018  
5:45 PM – 7:45 PM  
Gresham Library

**Facilitators:** Laurie Wells, Rachel Nehse, Sydney Roberts, Jose Ibarra, Brian Monberg, Kim McCarty

**Gresham City Councilors:** Karylenn Echols, Janine Gladfelter

**Participants:** 5 Gresham Residents, 12 Service Providers, 1 Wood Village Employee, 1 Rockwood Disabled Resident, 1 Gresham Senior Disabled Resident, 2 Fairview Residents, 1 Fairview Disabled Resident, 1 Portland Housing Bureau Employee (24 Total)

### Summary

Attendees participated in small group discussions to share their experiences in the community with City and County staff. Facilitators asked a series of questions to gather input and prioritize community needs regarding housing, infrastructure, economic opportunity and other services. While attendees shared their ideas and experiences, facilitators took notes to accurately record and summarize the groups' discussions. Following the discussion each participant was given three stickers to add to their group's notes to vote for items they felt were the highest priorities. Overall 21 attendees participated in voting with a total of 63 votes.

Participants emphasized housing needs as the highest priority throughout the group discussions and gave 38 votes (60% of the total votes) prioritizing housing issues.

- Attendees highlighted the lack of affordable housing, high move-in costs, and the stigma around multi-family or low-income housing.
- Participants shared their experiences with unfair treatment from landlords and emphasized the need for advocacy and communication with landlords and property management.
- Discussions called attention to senior citizen's housing needs and their increased vulnerability due to rising rents and property taxes. Seniors are often on fixed incomes and cannot afford drastic increases in their expenses. Many programs to prevent homelessness are only available to families with children.

The need for additional community services received a total of 11 votes (18%) votes from participants.

- Participants identified activities for youth as an area of high need and noted the closing of Skate World has had a negative impact on the community. The group suggested improved and additional parks and a new community center.
- Increased housing costs have highlighted the need for affordable healthcare, as many citizens cannot afford both and are going without medical care so they can afford rent.

Attendees discussed the lack of economic opportunities and jobs available in the area, which received 7 votes (11%) prioritizing this issue.

- Participants highlighted the lack of jobs, especially living wage jobs, in the Gresham area and noted that many historical employers have left the area due to increasing rents.
- Attendees suggested the City partner with community colleges and local businesses to create career pathways for youth to receive training and get connected with jobs upon program completion.

Participants expressed concern over necessary infrastructure improvements and gave 7 votes (11%) to these issues.

- Street improvements including better lighting, improved signage, additional flashing beacon cross walks, pothole repairs and increased parking were identified as areas of need by participants.
- Participants noted certain low-income neighborhoods lack grocery stores, making it difficult for residents to buy affordable food for their families.

**Question 1- Community Experience:** *What changes did you see in your city and/or neighborhood that contribute to a positive community experience? What changes did you see in your city and/or neighborhood that contribute to a negative community experience?*

### Positive

- **Community Events:** Events like the Saturday Markets, Teddy Bear Parade and movies in the park give families fun, free local events to attend. Monthly community meetings with organizations like Unlimited Choices, HomeForward, attorneys or DIY Weatherization provide useful information to community members. Participants noted that they would appreciate other services being linked with these events.
- **Safety:** Residents feel safe and the community is welcoming to newcomers. Rockwood residents noted a decrease in crime in the Rockwood area. Neighborhood watch groups increase security because community members look out for each other's property. **(2 Votes)**
- **Activities for Youth:** The addition of the Boys & Girls Club has given Gresham youth a safe place to go after school.
- **Community Gardens:** Residents who may not otherwise have access to fresh fruit and vegetables can participate for a low fee. Many low-income residents live in apartments and would not have the option of growing their own food without these gardens.
- **Energy Efficient Units:** These units reduce the cost of energy for the resident.
- **Access to Help & Services:** The ability to get help from the Gresham community increases stability and alleviates stress. For example, the Hometown Field helps families with children. Social connections to the community are important. Participants also mentioned the County Libraries, Meals on Wheels, food services available to homeless residents and community classes as positive additions to the community.
- **Access to MAX:** MAX provides reliable transportation to residents that may not otherwise have access.
- **Long Term Residents:** Gresham has a community of long-term residents who are invested in the City.

### Negative

- **Activities for Youth:** There is a high need for more safe activities for youth, such as skate parks or more movies in the park. Activities like sports aren't offered year-round and can be very expensive, making them inaccessible to low-income residents. Rockwood offers some activities, but community members do not feel safe sending their kids there. Skate World was an example of this, but it closed. The skate park was a safe, fun activity for local youth. The group agreed that a new park for kids to skate in would be a positive addition to the community. **(6 Votes)**
- **Homelessness & Lack of Shelters:** There is an increase in homelessness and people living on the streets. The only shelter in the area has been closed and there is an increasing need for homeless shelters as rents begin to rise and more residents are being pushed farther East.
- **Traffic:** Increasing population has resulted in increased traffic and congestion, as well as more wear and tear on roads. **(1 Vote)**
- **Old Buildings:** Buildings are built to old codes with inadequate lighting and old or inadequate safety features such as fire hydrants and emergency exits. **(1 Vote)**
- **High Rent:** Excessive rent hikes due to increased population and demand for affordable housing.
- **Public Transportation:** There is a lack of public transportation, particularly in certain neighborhoods.
- **Parks & Playgrounds:** The area needs more parks and the area around Willow Tree could benefit from a playground. **(1 Vote)**

**Question 2- Community Services Needed:** *Are community services in your city and/or neighborhood adequate? If not, what is missing? (Community services can include: recreation activities, social services, parks programs, etc.)*

- **Activities for Youth:** The group brought up Skate World and noted again that a replacement park and the addition of other activities, parks or centers for Gresham kids is an area of need.
- **Park Improvements:** Gresham and East County have a lack of parks and would benefit from additional parks as well as improvements to existing parks. The group liked park events such as movies in the park but noted that these events should be paired with more information about local service providers.
- **Community Center:** Gresham is lacking a community center for local residents.
- **Rent Assistance:** There is a high need for rent assistance resources. Many residents are rent burdened with half their monthly income going to their rent. **(1 Vote)**
- **Health Care:** Decreases in health care benefits are leaving residents without proper medication. Many renters have to choose between paying rent and paying for medical care, so their health is suffering. Often resident's health insurance through work doesn't cover basic necessities such as diabetes treatment. Citizens could benefit from health care programs for low-income, seniors and emergency services. **(1 Vote)**
- **Lack of Low-Income Housing:** Many units that were previously low-income units are being converted into market rate, so they are no longer affordable.
- **Job Training:** Training opportunities for residents could help increase their wages.
- **Food Desert:** Many neighborhoods, including Rockwood, lack affordable grocery stores, making groceries inaccessible and unaffordable for low income residents. **(1 Vote)**

**Question 3- Economic Opportunity:** *What economic development activities would you like to see in your city and/or neighborhood? (Economic development can include: job training, job creation, micro-enterprise projects, improvements to business store fronts, etc.)*

- **Job Training for Youth:** The City could partner with local community colleges to create pathways for local youth to receive job-specific training. Additionally, the City could partner with local businesses to help connect students with jobs once they have completed the community college program. **(3 Votes)**
- **Food Deserts:** Particularly in the low-income Rockwood area there is a lack of grocery stores to supply residents with affordable, healthy food. Many residents turn to unhealthy alternatives and/or overpay for groceries at expensive convenience stores.
- **Lack of Housing:** An increase in population in Gresham and East Multnomah County has increased demand for housing. The area lacks affordable units and this makes it so that low-wage workers in Gresham have difficulty affording rent in the community they work in. Rents should be more consistent with income levels. **(1 Vote)**
- **More Bus Routes:** Many low-income residents rely on public transportation to get to work. A lack of bus routes in certain neighborhoods limits the opportunities for residents in those neighborhoods to get and maintain employment.
- **Store Improvements & Nightlife:** Rehabilitating old run-down stores to make them nicer may help with economic development in the area. Participants noted that Gresham currently has no nightlife and may benefit from additional and/or improved businesses.
- **Rockwood Rising:** This project should bring more jobs and opportunities to the Rockwood neighborhood.
- **Transitional Training Programs:** People retiring would train new staff to take over for them instead of leaving and taking all of their knowledge with them.
- **Home Ownership:** Programs to help low income residents become homeowners. **(3 Votes)**
- **Job Opportunities:** Gresham is lacking in job opportunities. Most jobs are in Portland, which forces workers to commute. Many jobs in Gresham are minimum wage and higher paid opportunities are unavailable, which limits opportunities for low-income residents. Additionally, many historic employers

have left the area, which decreases available jobs. For example, the tamale factory employed many Gresham residents, but had to close due to commercial rent increases. **(4 Votes)**

**Question 4- Infrastructure Improvements:** *What infrastructure improvement projects do you think are needed in your community? (Infrastructure improvements include: more lighting, street improvements, sidewalks, pedestrian crossings, park projects, etc.)*

- **Parking:** Participants expressed concern about increasing demand for parking as new developments come into the area and the population continues to increase. Zoning for new developments should be looked at to see how new projects will impact parking. The area has many narrow streets with street parking that makes it difficult for vehicles to get through. Wider streets would help alleviate this problem.
- **Street Improvements:** Many streets are in disrepair and during the winter it can be difficult to see potholes because it is dark and they fill with water. This is an issue city-wide, but the groups specifically called out Division Street and Sandy Blvd as areas of concern. The groups specifically mentioned a need for more flashing beacon crossings, better lighting, improved signage and more sidewalks. Many streets are currently unsafe to walk at night and people have sustained life changing injuries due to the poor visibility. **(3 Votes)**
- **Grocery Stores:** Many neighborhoods where working people live lack adequate grocery stores.
- **Prevention Programs:** Gresham needs prevention programs to reduce the vandalism in the City's parks, specifically the Japanese park.
- **Public Facilities:** Additional public restrooms would be helpful for visitors to the area. Public showers could be helpful to the homeless community.
- **Community Center:** The Gresham area could benefit from a community center. **(2 Votes)**
- **Better Bus Stations:** Many bus stations are not covered, which makes them less accessible to families with children in certain weather. Stations are also often too crowded and bus fares can be too expensive for low-income families.

**Question 5- Barriers to Housing & Housing Discrimination:** *Do you know of anyone who has experienced barriers to housing choice or housing discrimination? How does this impact the community as a whole?*

- **Senior Citizen Renters:** There is an increased need for housing for seniors in the area. Many local landlords will look for reasons to evict seniors or will drastically increase rents, making their units unaffordable for seniors living on fixed incomes. Homeless seniors have different needs than other homeless citizens, which creates even more barriers for them. Shelters are often inaccessible for seniors, who may not be able to get up onto a bunk bed. Additionally, there is a lack of resources for them. Many programs are aimed at families with children or single parents, so they cannot apply for help through these programs. **(3 Votes)**
- **Senior Citizen Homeowners:** Increase in property values in the area has caused an increase in property taxes. Seniors who own their homes and are on a fixed income may not be able to afford the increased taxes, putting them at risk for homelessness. **(2 Votes)**
- **Low Income Families & Move-in Costs:** Many families who may be able to afford an apartment still cannot find a place to rent because landlords will require 2 times the rent as a deposit. Landlords may also force low income families to sign longer term leases that they may not be able to commit to. If the family can find a unit to rent, move-in costs deplete all their resources. **(5 Votes)**
- **Stigma Around Multi-Family Housing:** There is a negative perception around "affordable" or multi-family housing projects. **(2 Votes)**

- **Homelessness:** Homelessness overall is increasing in the area due to rising rents and an increase in population as people from Portland get pushed East for more affordable housing. **(3 Votes)**
- **Advocacy & Communication with Property Managers:** Service providers who build relationships with their clients' property managers have an easier time keeping their clients housed. The property manager will be more likely to work with the service provider on behalf of the client when they have a positive relationship with the service provider. **(2 Votes)**
- **A Home for Everyone:** Concerns were brought up regarding how this money is being spent. **(1 Vote)**
- **Inconsistent Rent at Mobile Home Parks:** Spaces for a single wide are often equal to or more than spaces for a double wide, making it more difficult for smaller households to afford them.
- **Unfair Treatment from Landlords:** Landlords and/or property managers can be abusive and discriminate against tenants, especially those who are low-income or non-English speakers. Many Latino families have reported bullying and threats from their landlords to some of the service providers in the area. Landlords will use different eviction tactics to push these tenants out so they can hike up the rent and some have tried to increase rent on tenants while still in the middle of their agreement. Tenants are left demoralized and depressed. They feel unsafe as a result of discrimination and harassment from their landlords. **(2 Votes)**
- **Affordability:** There are fewer safe and affordable choices for low income families, especially those with children. There is increased competition for affordable units as more families are pushed East due to Portland's rising rents. Many residents, especially seniors, are going without necessities such as medical care and food in order to afford rent. **(10 Votes)**
- **No Jobs for Teens:** Teens are unable to get jobs, so they cannot help contribute financially to their families.
- **Housing for 50-80% MFI:** There is not enough regulated housing for 50-80% MFI households. The naturally affordable housing i.e. low-cost unregulated housing is becoming more scarce. **(1 Vote)**
- **Hidden Fees:** Credit issues can lead to increased move in costs, like a higher deposit. **(1 Vote)**
- **Landlords Picking Tenants:** CAT has confirmed issues with landlords processing multiple applications at once, then picking and choosing a single tenant. This creates a financial burden for all of the tenants who paid an application fee but are not chosen to rent and creates possible fair housing violations. Application fees are often \$35-50, which makes searching for an apartment expensive and unaffordable for low-income households.
- **Mold:** There is a lot of different information regarding mold and how to address it.
- **Mental Health:** Residents with mental health issues often get the police called on them. This can result in future rejections when applying for housing.
- **Navigating Laws & Resources:** Tenants may have a difficult time understanding their rights and/or accessing resources when they are being treated unfairly. Many tenants don't want to complain for fear of retaliation from their landlords. **(1 Vote)**
- **Lack of Childcare:** Gresham lacks childcare, especially for children with disabilities. Community members may have to travel to Portland to access services and/or childcare. The high cost of rent may also make childcare unaffordable to low-income families.

**Question 6- Priorities:** *Given our discussion of community services, economic development, infrastructure improvements, and housing choice, what are your top priorities? You each have 3 stickers to place on your highest priorities. You can use all on one priority or on multiple priorities.*

<b>Votes</b>	<b>Topic</b>
10	Affordable Housing (Question 5)
6	Activities for Youth (Question 2)
5	Low-Income Families & Move-In Costs (Question 5)
4	Job Opportunities (Question 3)
3	Homeownership (Question 3)
3	Job Training for Youth (Question 3)
3	Street Improvements (Question 4)
3	Senior Citizen Renters (Question 5)
3	Homelessness (Question 5)
2	Safety (Question 1)
2	Community Center (Question 4)
2	Senior Citizen Homeowners (Question 5)
2	Stigma Around Multi-Family Housing (Question 5)
2	Advocacy & Communication with Property Managers (Question 5)
2	Unfair Treatment from Landlords
1	Traffic (Question 1)
1	Old Buildings (Question 1)
1	Parks & Playgrounds (Question 1)
1	Rent Assistance (Question 2)
1	Healthcare (Question 2)
1	Food Desert (Question 2)
1	Lack of Housing (Question 3)
1	A Home For Everyone (Question 5)
1	Housing for 50-80% MFI (Question 5)
1	Hidden Fees (Question 5)
1	Navigating Laws & Resources (Question 5)