

These focus groups are the second of four components which GBMS has committed to for our “Listening to Learn.” The first was business engagement with face-to-face interactions, meeting business owners where they are. The third was the Committee Orientation and Main Street Introduction. Creating a space where interested and engaged volunteers can learn more about how the organization wants to operate and move forward with them. The last is a community celebration and visioning event, still in the works.

Method

GBMS extended invitations to more than 25 community members to join focus groups. Our goals were to engage previously unheard from voices, and increase the number of business owners giving input to our projects. In the end, 10 business owners, 6 government or district affiliated community members and 5 members of nonprofits/employees/other community members were able to join with a total of 21 participants in four focus groups. The same two board members were facilitators, and other board members and Community Coordinator provided note taking.

Questions

We wanted to answer 5 questions:

1. What is your vision of what Ellensburg avenue looks like? (As a business owner, as a resident, as a consumer?)
2. What could GBMS be doing better for you?
3. What services would you want us to provide?
4. How can we better communicate with the community? With you?
5. How would you like to be involved with GBMS/with revitalization efforts?

Results

- 1. What is your vision of what Ellensburg avenue looks like? (As a business owner, as a resident, as a consumer?)**

At each focus group topics of note were underground power, traffic calming, color palettes, and a tidy, clean and welcoming community appearance.

Regarding color palettes, some business owners cited brand identity and needing to stand out to be identifiable, as reasons against color palettes. Others cited a need for town cohesiveness and tidiness as

justification for a color palette. All suggested that a decision made regarding the necessary ordinances and incentives would need to have business owners at the table.

Underground power was mentioned at every gathering. The importance of strong collaboration with the various agencies and consultants, was acknowledged by everyone. Some suggested a feasibility study, or a needs assessment survey. Some participants felt it is one of the primary infrastructures needed on our main street to begin creating a safe and welcoming town. Stories of rural towns putting their power underground, and the impact on the towns look and tourism were shared. Some expressed that underground power combined with lamp posts, could begin to make our town look inviting and cohesive.

Another project often discussed was traffic calming. Various strategies were discussed with business owners and community members having a variety of opinions. In the case of lane reduction strategies, some business owners were concerned about traffic jams and potential areas of increased accidents. However, some were in favor, slowing down traffic means more business visibility, and increasing the likelihood someone will stop to shop. Other suggestions were increased traffic signals, crosswalks or adjusted entryways for businesses. Some participants were in favor of traffic calming strategies because of increased pedestrian safety, in particular because of the schools' proximity to Highway 101.

Other ideas and projects which were discussed:

- Brush cleanup- being firewise
- Public trash bins
- Dog clean up bags
- Hanging flower baskets
- Streetlamps
- Trails and beach access promotion
- Increased wayfinding signage
- Increasing public art
- Public Wifi access
- Distinct business district
- Walkability and pedestrian safety
- Increased workforce housing
- Block parties/community events
- Improved promotion of current services and opportunities
- Port improvements
- Lamp post banners
- Widening sidewalks, improving sidewalks
- Energy efficient lights that create warmth and safe ambiance

2. What could GBMS be doing better for you?

Most participants were encouraging, citing no real concerns over Gold Beach Main Street's previous work.

3. What services would you want us to provide?

Some participants suggested promotions as one way that Gold Beach Main street could support businesses better. Other participants suggested that one service GBMS could provide is being an advocate for incentives or a supporting organization in ordinance creation.

4. How can we better communicate with the community? With you?

Participants highlighted the need to use all forms of communication if wanting to engage more of the community. Highlighting the use of social media but also suggesting utilizing email more as well as phone calls. They also suggested that organizational branding and messaging could be stronger, with more clarity. It was suggested that GBMS define their message, and stick to that message.

Business owners expressed a desire to be more connected with for input, since they believe they are significantly impacted by the work of GBMS. They also suggested a greater need for partnerships with other organizations and entities, specifically the City, County and ODOT.

5. How would you like to be involved with GBMS/with revitalization efforts?

This question had various results. Most participants were supportive of GBMS efforts and in some cases were unclear of how to be more involved. Others wanted to offer support to specific projects but were not interested in being volunteers or serving on committees.

Conclusions

In conclusion, we were able to gather many new community opinions. The most significant goal of these focus groups being to engage with previously unheard from voices and create new spaces for listening. Moving forward, we have better insight and guidance when supporting committees on future projects. We also believe that we have a better idea of where strategic partnering will be the most beneficial for the community. Many participants said that they were honored to be invited, and excited to contribute to Gold Beach's future vision. With this we will strive to keep the community engaged and informed. A long time local resident recently said he has not seen such spirit in Gold Beach in 20 years! We will continue to use the information gathered at these focus groups to share with citizens, agencies, and local government. We plan to continue to engage our community as we work to better serve our town.