

Ready to Listen Focus Group Summary Memo

April 2023

This document provides a summary of focus groups interviews conducted between February 14 and March 1. Interviews will inform the work going forward and are supplementary to the feedback that was collected during the first round of public engagement held in February and March.

The meetings had representation from various groups throughout the city including individuals in:

- Infrastructure and Public Utilities
- Community Services
- Economic Development
- Elected Office
- Housing Development
- Major Employment
- Open Space and Recreation
- Age Groups (high school students and seniors)

Individuals were initially asked to introduce themselves and share a bit about their personal connection to the city and this planning process. Many were excited about the opportunity to discuss topics with peers and shared in their excitement about the city undergoing such a process. Participants were also asked to describe some of the successes and challenges they have witnessed in relation to their respective areas of expertise. Fluid conversation prompted other ideas as people shared their personal and professional experiences.

The following includes themes heard from the conversations so as not to specifically identify any one individual. Common questions were asked in each interview. The memorandum is divided into the following sections:

1. Successes and Progress
2. Opportunities and Challenges

1. Successes and Progress

Community facilities

- Growth has added more younger families to the city.
- The construction of the new middle school building.
- City programming has improved. Parks and Recreation provides programs for all ages.
- Senior Center and Library provide a range of activities.

Community safety

- The city is one of the safest cities in the region and in the state of Ohio. With the newer fire station and a new police station in the works, it will only enhance the city as being one of the safest communities.

Education institutions

- The city and school district are partnering more.
- The school district does a good job engaging with the community. For example, the Amazing Shake allowed students to engage with community members in real world situations. All seventh

graders learned how to make eye contact, engage in discussion and various communication scenarios with adults.

- Lorain County Community College (LCCC) works closely with the city. LCCC is a strength in the community that attracts people and offers education for all adult age ranges.

Existing city location

- The city is able to attract development such as housing because of proximity to transportation networks and regional amenities.

Existing parks

- Park systems are strong and well utilized. For example, there are always people at South Central Park.
- Amenity improvements are underway including an amphitheater and cabins for out-of-town guests. The city is looking to provide other programs and amenities that are more than just sport specific activities.
- Parks and Recreation offer programs (special and educational) for all ages and newer fitness programs with bikes.
- Victory Park hosts tournaments that bring visitors to the city.

Local government and investment

- Local government is willing to have conversations and to create a positive environment.
- Residents are opening their own businesses or investing locally.
- Conversations between businesses and the city have shifted to be able to discuss business needs.

Medical needs and facilities

- Seniors have access to several skilled nursing facilities and all levels of care.

Tight knit community

- The city is full of tight knit community members. Residents are very generous when it comes to donations and charity.

Infrastructure improvements

- Ten years ago, the city began the process to rebuild wastewater infrastructure. With the newer system, estimated to last 25-30 years, the city is able to stay in compliance with federal and state requirements and maintain healthy standards.
- Regardless of the current city growth, wastewater infrastructure is well below the maximum servicing capacity.
- Flooding and inflow/infiltration are being addressed. A storm water division has been added to the city to address major areas, as well as implementing catch basins and retention programs.
- The city has added snow and ice removal.
- Road widening along Center Ridge Road will help attract more businesses and improve traffic flows.
- There is progress with removing and replacing neighborhood streets. The city was far behind pavement repairs but is slowly catching up.

2. Opportunities or Challenges

Additional parks and open space

- Acquiring lands to grow parks and open space. For example, there is property across from HoopTech that is now a wetland. If the city acquired the property, trails could be added.
- Acquiring land through state and federal funding for passive space.
- Adding parkland that is more than just sports fields.

Affordable housing

- Attracting younger families and adults with housing options at different price points. The city used to be affordable, but the higher end market has increased housing costs.

Business and retail growth

- Supporting local and major businesses. The city recently approved Dayton Freight that will bring 140 new jobs to the city.
- Providing additional retail and restaurant options so residents do not have to drive outside the city for goods.
- Attracting more industry to help with the city's bottom line.
- Considering a mix of uses to create attractive areas and generate income.
- Being proactive, such as having some shovel ready sites for incoming businesses.

Growth and development

- Developing a town center at Center Ridge Road and 83. A town center would go a long way in creating a neighborhood.
- Drawing more regional shopping and amenities would help. There is not much that would currently draw people to the town.

Mobility

- The city could be more active and walkable.
- Improving mobility connection to other neighborhoods or areas.
- Improving current traffic.

Public transportation

- Adding transportation services. Currently, there is a senior citizen bus, which people 60 years and over can call for a ride.
- Creating a fixed bus route and schedule.
- Considering options for truck routes, other than through Center Ridge.
- Keeping up with road improvements and maintenance, which can be unsettling for people travelling by vehicle.

Senior programming

- Improving programming at the Senior Center.
- Providing more mental health support similar to Dementia with Friends.
- Finding more health employees to fill in demand.

Tax and service balance

- Balancing services and taxes. Low taxes draw people to the community. Many city improvements have been made while maintaining the current tax rate.
- Continuing to educate people so that they fully understand issues at hand and become comfortable with voting issues.