



Portland Metropolitan Workforce Training Center **Redevelopment**

Fall 2020 Community Focus Groups Report

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PMWTC Redevelopment - Fall 2020 Community Focus Groups Report

Introduction

During Fall 2020, community members throughout NE Portland joined online focus groups hosted by the Portland Metropolitan Training Center (PMWTC) redevelopment project team. The focus groups, which aligned with the conclusion of the project's design phase, gathered input from community members on how they perceived the plans made thus far for the center's spaces and services.

Living Cully, a collaboration of nonprofit groups that support people of color and low-income residents, once again assisted PCC with this outreach campaign by recruiting their constituents to participate in the focus groups. This effort allowed for community input into the design process despite the restrictions posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Methodology

At the online focus groups, the project team first provided the participants with an introduction to the project. This overview covered the plans for the new PCC building, the site, and the housing development. General questions were answered.

The attendees were then invited to engage in a conversation about the project. The redevelopment team asked for input on what qualities the attendees wanted in the design of the public buildings, open spaces, activities and services.

Attendees were asked the following questions:

What makes them feel welcome and safe in public spaces?

What causes the opposite to occur?

What would they like to find in the plaza and outdoor areas of the redevelopment that would make them come back?

What types of events and activities do they want to see in their community?

What resources or services do they access? And what other services do they want to see in the community?

What makes them feel like they belong to a community?

What would make the affordable housing building an appealing place to live?

How can the affordable housing building create a sense of community and belonging, both for its residents and the neighborhood overall?

Fall 2020 outreach facts:

61 community members

13 community recruiters

8 focus groups

2 languages (English and Spanish)

4 agencies

Living Cully

Habitat for Humanity

Hacienda CDC

Native American Youth and Family Center (NAYA)

9 affinity groups

Affordable housing homeowners

Black community members

Community-based organizations staff and volunteers

Community members with disabilities

Latinx community members

Native American elders and youth

Residents of mobile home parks

Small-business owners and workers

Somali youth

Influences of community feedback in the design and operations

The participants' general impressions regarding the redevelopment plans were positive. The collective review of the plans confirmed the building design and helped identify additional needs and ideas that could influence the design and the service partnerships under consideration. The project team is hard at work incorporating many of the comments received, although they acknowledge that not all requests can be delivered at this one site.

Below is a summary of the influences this important phase of community outreach had on the project.

- **Accessibility:** At the request of participants, a separate focus group was devoted to discuss accessibility. This group used a disability justice lens to review the proposed plans and encouraged the project team to revisit certain design elements, including the parking lot, wayfinding and signage.
- **Welcoming lobby and staff:** One important goal of the PMWTC building design is to provide a defined entry point for visitors and clients. At most of the focus groups, it was repeatedly stated that culturally responsible staff and clear wayfinding are the most important elements for building users.
- **Service partners:** Participants' feedback indicated support for the service partnerships chosen for the new facility, its programming goals, and the array of services planned for the Home Forward residents. The college is pursuing a service partner that can offer programs benefiting both DHS clients as well as community members at large. At all focus groups, participants elaborated on a number of unmet needs and recognized that the PMWTC and affordable housing are assets to NE Portland residents. Some examples of these services include food access and educational goals support.
- **Public art:** Community members at all focus groups stressed the importance of including art as a way to honor the history and diverse stories of the community. During the summer of 2021, PCC will launch a public art acquisition process inviting artists to submit proposals for this bond-funded project. An art selection committee will be formed with representatives from the college and the community.
- **Safety:** The plans considered design elements that provide a sense of safety and security for clients, staff, housing residents, and pedestrians. The comments from focus groups confirmed the collective desire to plan for clear lines of sight, lighting, and wider sidewalks to allow people to safely move through the site at any time of the day. Participants highlighted their hopes for improved street crossing sections.
- **Community use of spaces:** The plans proposed spaces that will welcome neighbors and community members regardless of their relationship with the PMWTC. Typically PCC charges a fee for outside use of college space. There is high interest from community members to open spaces to the public for events free of charge. The college will look into the possibility of meeting this request.

For more details about what was discussed at each focus group, please refer to the summaries in the following pages.

Focus groups' notes and highlights

A summary of the meeting notes and highlights per each meeting can be found below.

Black community members

THEMES

- Relations with caring staff
- Art
- Racial and age diversity
- Public transit
- Gathering space for music and drumming
- Access to the community room
- Resident support services
- Outdoor areas
- Prosperity

ASPIRATIONS

- The inclusion of art, such as murals that tell stories about the rich diversity in the community past and present.
- A rotating art gallery that encourages and supports the work of local artists as well as make the site a destination. Art to showcase the work of current social leaders.
- Access to the community room for various groups and agencies. Space for drumming and sharing art and music history.
- Classes for community members on topics such as home maintenance or yoga.
- A covered outdoor area to find peace, to relax and comfortably sit to read a book.
- Access to outdoor areas that embrace natural elements. Opportunities to listen and observe birds, insects, and squirrels and to enjoy plants and trees.
- Small business incubator space to help support entrepreneurs.
- A place to exercise.
- A community garden.
- Areas and activities that encourage intergenerational connections.
- Laundry facilities as part of the housing complex.
- A housing management team that can support residents, de-escalate situations and mediate issues.
- Private study rooms that the housing residents can reserve for study or work.

INSIGHTS

Supportive relationships: The PMWTC staff's efforts to make the current building a place where people feel welcomed are greatly appreciated. One person mentioned that the longevity of these relationships is what makes them special. There should be a thoughtful transition as the new building comes together.

Encouraging diversity: Representation is urgent. Diversity already exists in the neighborhood and there is a strong desire to have people of color be part of the staff, clients, visitors of the plaza, and residents of the housing units.

Opening doors: The workforce development center right next to housing units, with retail space on the first floor, offers an opportunity to link academic success with job training and entrepreneurial work.

Community-based organizations staff and volunteers

THEMES

- Wayfinding and signage for diverse audiences
- Culturally responsive staff
- Accessibility
- Cultural events
- Art
- Community events
- Lighting
- Sidewalks
- Crosswalks
- Housing affordability

ASPIRATIONS

- Outdoor tables and seating areas that accommodate different sizes of wheelchairs.
- Clear indoor and outdoor wayfinding and signage that alleviates uncertainty of not knowing where to go.
- Gender-neutral restrooms in the PCC facility.
- Opportunities for artistic and cultural events, such as live music concerts and dance groups like the Aztec Dance Group. Changing art displays in the plaza or the buildings to encourage community members to visit more often.
- Programs that are available to community members, such as adult literacy and computer literacy.
- Free or low-cost exercise or movement classes to build community around healthy habits.
- Sufficient lighting so people can see where they are going.
- Improved street crossings, complete sidewalks, and walkways to access the buildings for people who do not drive a car.
- Areas for children to play and explore.
- Plans for semi-private spaces such as nooks and crannies for people to find a moment of quiet.
- A well-lit, covered outdoor area for groups to practice performances and be able to be in community.

INSIGHTS

Staffing and wayfinding: Both the PCC and Home Forward buildings need culturally responsive staff, and the site should have a designated point of entry and clear signage throughout.

Seeking connection: Participants also talked fondly of being in community with others and how they seek that out. There was a specific reference to how being around other people makes people feel safe and belonging.

Improving safety: Streets lacking sidewalks and poor pedestrian infrastructure in the area make people feel unsafe walking in the neighborhood.

Habitat for Humanity homeowners

THEMES

- History of the neighborhood
- Multigenerational spaces
- Pedestrian and bikers street safety
- Parking
- Sports as connection builders
- Youth programs
- Childcare
- Affordable housing application process

ASPIRATIONS

- An oral history project marking not only the redevelopment, but also the communities that historically and currently live there.
- Increase safety for pedestrian crosswalks and bike paths in the area.
- Reduction and/or better enforcement of the speed limit on Killingsworth Street.
- Sports facilities or a basketball court.
- Free to low-cost programs for youth to keep healthy, occupied and learning. Ideas shared were music and tutoring programs.
- Affordable childcare.

INSIGHTS

Simplified applications: Applications for affordable housing rentals and for home ownership are seen as overwhelming even for those who have become homeowners.

Stable housing: Stable, dignified housing can make the difference for individuals' and families' well-being.

Support system: Housing complexes can be a great way to find and create community.

Latinx and Somali community members

THEMES

- Gathering spaces
- Sharing cultural traditions
- Sports fields
- Racial diversity
- Personal growth
- Support and learning groups
- Interconnectedness
- Belonging
- Housing affordability
- Safety

ASPIRATIONS

- A community center, a place for people to gather informally or host celebrations.
- Events to share traditions, food, stories, and art from cultures, where all are invited.
- A community mosque.
- Classes for all ages. Some examples mentioned were homework groups and language learning groups.
- Job training services.
- Gymnasium or exercise classes for all ages.
- Outdoor area and planned activities for children.
- Affordable rent.
- Entries to the housing units from the building interior.
- Safety measures to prevent theft and violence.
- Housing management team that informs residents of important events and information and helps provide solutions to residents' issues.

INSIGHTS

A sense of belonging: Participants shared how diversity in the community at large makes them feel safe and welcome.

Achieving goals: The PMWTC project is a chance to develop human connections among peers within the diverse communities it will serve. These groups recognize the unique challenges each faces and offer one another encouragement and support for achieving their educational and personal goals.

Police involvement: Participants shared that although they like many things about living in Cully, the violence and shootings in the neighborhood fills them with sadness and fear. They hope to see the police more involved in keeping their neighborhood safe, rather than just seeing them when something bad has occurred.

NAYA elders and youth

THEMES

- Healthy environments
- Radon
- Gathering spaces
- Access to the community room
- Accessibility
- Supportive building environment for elders
- Arts and crafts
- Land acknowledgement
- Housing affordability

ASPIRATIONS

- Handrails along corridors inside the building, along ramps or even small sets of stairs.
- Access to a space where members of the community could gather to craft or just be together in community. Spaces for drumming and dancing to occur.
- Programs such as fraud-prevention classes, meetings with city officials, general gatherings, and anti-gentrification efforts.
- Sufficient lighting to allow people to see where they are going from dusk to dawn and to deter criminal activity.
- Safety button installed on the site similar to those on college campuses to call for help if necessary.
- Finished sidewalks for pedestrians to move through the site and access the nearby areas.
- A land acknowledgement; to recognize whom the land belongs to and who currently lives here.
- Art events for community members of all ages to get to know each other.
- Food pantry.
- Youth activities.

INSIGHTS

Radon risks: This group inquired about radon in the area. They said that history has shown how people have been exposed to unhealthy environments. New construction is expected to take in consideration and address these types of environmental hazards.

Assisting elders: Elders should be prioritized when designing buildings and planning assistance programs. Elders and other community members thrive when they are able to gather and be in community with others.

Accessibility focus: As part of the housing community there should be programs that support elders and people who have mobility challenges. This can include help with running errands or grocery shopping.

People with Disabilities

THEMES

- Navigating a world built for able bodies
- Diversity in abilities
- Diversity in identities and intersectionality
- Access to the community room
- Efficiency in getting needs met
- Signage and wayfinding
- Strict budgets
- Housing options
- Housing affordability

ASPIRATIONS

- Plans for spaces designed to answer to everyone's needs and abilities.
- Clear signage and way-finding throughout the buildings and site.
- Adult-sized changing table included in at least one all-user restroom in the PCC building.
- Comfortable places to meet and come together.
- Informational sessions and bulletin boards that highlight local elections, ballots and community resources.
- Fragrance-free policy for the PCC building.
- Playground that encourages the interaction of all ages and abilities.
- Outdoor covered space for wheelchair users.
- Housing units that plan for wheelchair users' diversity. Some users may be children, some may be adults or caretakers; some wheelchair users live independently while others live with others.
- Food pantry and free community library.
- Wheelchair charging station.

INSIGHTS

Broader consideration: Accessibility should be considered as part of designing facilities beyond ADA parking, entrances and restrooms. It should also contemplate other aspects of design such as the location and height of signage, light and power switches and mailboxes. Access to trash and recycling facilities as well as the functionality of laundry machines were mentioned. Sensory issues that affect some people can be mitigated with light dimmers and acoustic treatments.

Ensure access: The lack of fully accessible spaces affects the desire of disabled community members to participate in activities. Participants shared that it is physically and mentally exhausting to continually encounter such challenges.

Scarcity of housing: Disabled friendly spaces are an asset that people with disabilities recognize. The limitations to built spaces leads to a scarcity of housing options that meet wheelchair users' needs.

Residents of mobile home parks

THEMES

- Staff, building and signage, sense welcoming and inclusivity
- Food security
- Art
- Multicultural events
- Safety
- Lighting
- Outdoor spaces for residents
- Access to the community room

ASPIRATIONS

- Dedicated space and activities for youth.
- Monthly events similar to the Portland's Saturday Market that would bring people together to foster cultural exchange and sell their crafts.
- Small business support via counseling and business incubation space.
- Support for social services that help address food insecurity and homelessness such as a food pantry.
- Healthcare services.
- Indoor and outdoor space for community groups to meet regularly for activities, such as rehearsing traditional dances. Sheltered outdoor space would allow people to spend time outdoors year around.
- Enhanced security in the neighborhood. There has been theft and break-ins in the area.
- A vegetable garden open to the public.
- The inclusion of art, such as murals that tell stories about the rich diversity in the community past and present.

INSIGHTS

Function over design: The group spoke candidly about how the community function of the building was much more important to them than the architectural design.

Food insecurity: Regarding the potential to host a regular farmer's market at the plaza, some people said that such a market would serve medium to high-income earners while failing to address the pressing issue of food insecurity in the nearby neighborhood.

Informing through art: Attendees discussed how art can be a vehicle to recognize and highlight that Native Americans have been present in the area for generations, and that the neighboring community is home to many refugees and immigrants from all over the world.

Small-business owners and workers

THEMES

- Diversity in race, age, ability, gender
- Community events
- Safety
- Lighting
- Accessibility
- Signage
- Service animals
- Art
- Food security
- Residents support services

ASPIRATIONS

- A building that serves the community, whether through youth programming, support for artists and local business, or other opportunities.
- Support for local artists through efforts such as a rotating art gallery, and initiatives that allow artists to support themselves through their artwork.
- Inclusive signage in outdoor and indoor areas.
- Family friendly events that bring diverse crowds such as the Jade Night Market or the downtown Portland's Saturday Market.
- Activities and areas planned for children.
- Farmer's market and other solutions to make healthful food more accessible.
- Safety considerations such as outdoor and parking lighting and clear lines of sight.
- Services available for the housing residents such as community resources referrals, assistance for food insecurity, accessible transportation and homework clubs. Housing programs can serve as a stepping-stone to reach stability.
- Laundry facilities in the housing building.
- Clear feedback systems for the housing units. Proactively request input, engage in conversations focused on improvement, and continually address issues.

INSIGHTS

Connecting with others: People like gathering and connecting with others, specifically in places where they feel welcomed and where they can join others who share the same culture or racial identity.

Embracing diversity: The large diversity in the Cully neighborhood can be reflected in the buildings and celebrated through future activities and events.

Food access: The local area is identified as a food desert and residents in the affordable housing will be transit dependent. Programming to assist with food insecurity can be highly valued.

Conclusion

Living Cully is grateful for the opportunity to work closely with PCC to ensure that the voices of Black and indigenous people, people of color, and low-income people from the Cully neighborhood have been prioritized in the planning for this project. We look forward to remaining involved as the Portland Metropolitan Workforce Training Center redevelopment moves forward. We are excited to continue our partnership with PCC to find creative ways to achieve community members' visions and priorities—at this site and beyond.

—Living Cully

Portland Community College is thankful to the members of the community who lent their expertise and comments on the proposed plans for the Portland Metropolitan Workforce Training Center. This round of outreach was critical to helping the project's redevelopment team understand the priorities of the Cully neighbors and their interest in the collective well-being. The PMWTC project has been greatly enriched through their participation.

Living Cully's leadership and its partner agencies' undertaking were fundamental in carrying out this effort.