



TOWN TALKS ~ *learning from the past, living in the present and planning for the future*

SUMMARY

The initial **TOWN TALKS** 90-minute session was the third of the Town Council's Communication Committee's outreach events. It was held at Maple Hall on September 19, 2022. Five tables of 5-6 citizens participated in the open sharing and listening process, expressing their passion for the town of La Conner and their desire to rise to the challenges of growth and change while staying true to what makes La Conner uniquely livable.

Facilitators* assisted at each table, assuring that all had a voice. Recorders* took notes, capturing areas where citizens had deep concerns and creative ideas for improvement. Each table charted its key points and reported out verbally to the larger group. The input and ideas ranged from the need for improved communication to the challenge of growth and density to the need for open space and ball fields.

Attached please find the raw, compiled notes as taken by the recorders. In addition, we have attached, with her permission, follow up notes from participant Catey Richie.

As planned, the Communication Committee will forward all notes from the September 19, 2022 session to the Town Council and Mayor to help inform future conversations and action by the town.

LOOKING FORWARD

The Communications Committee recommends that the **TOWN TALKS** sessions reconvene in 2023 for La Conner residents to talk together in more detail on the important topics raised at the September 19th general listening session. The Committee will send all notes from the 2023 sessions to the Town Council and Mayor for their review and attention.

The sessions will be on the following topics:

COMMUNICATION: January 2023 (TBD)

La Conner citizens gather to provide input and creative ideas for improving transparency, engagement, openness, mutual respect, communication tools and timeliness in city-citizen communication.

COMMUNITY VISION: March 2023 (TBD)

La Conner citizens gather to provide input on their community’s vision for bringing its values, diversity, history, and small-town magic into the future and develop creative ideas to ensure that future-related decisions are based on that vision.

CLARIFICATION: May 2023 (TBD)

La Conner citizens gather to provide input and creative ideas on the following topics:

- development, growth, and density (i.e., Port of Skagit, Center Street)
- public safety including a walk-friendly/bike-friendly environment
- infrastructure needs including water treatment and parking
- open spaces, parks, and ball fields
- sustainable business, retail, and industry

Details on session dates, times and location will be announced at a later date.

Summary submitted by Hanneman, Harlan, McCauley, and Bennett on October 16, 2022.

*Many thanks to our TOWN TALKS Session Volunteers:

Facilitators

Kate Bennett

Gail Bruce

Gretchen McCauley

Kevin Meenaghan

Leslie Smith

Recorders

MaryLee Chamberlain

Rick Dole

Susan Erickson

Marna Hanneman

Scott Thomas

Town Council, Planning Commission should have Greater role in Driving Ideas

Affordable Housing

Preserve character of Town while providing Affordable housing

Density

Comprehensive Plan

Developers given greenlight - Need Balance

La Conner should preserve its roots in a historic town

More government transparency - more meetings p places for public meetings

Green space, Swimming pool

Tail wagging the dog planner

Administration works for the commission and council

Tribal relationships

What we love about La Conner:

Community

Physical environment

The people

Magic skagit

Neighbors helping neighbors

Diversity

Tribe, Farming, shelter Bay - getting along

Income diversity, housing- different salary levels

Not enough community engagement

Walkable bike friendly

Destination oriented not just first street/boardwalk

Think outside the box

Seems like green light for developers - Center Street, Port development

Planner issues

Affordable housing needs balance

Subjective decisions being made

Code versus case by case analysis - who does this? Planner, Commission

Livability

Safe feeling, density, what is appropriate?

Planner making decisions without consulting the PC Mayor calling to mitigate but then denying

People need a voice - keep things to a people level of usability

Climate change preparation

Accountability - Budget line items, more details

Communication - How information received - Paper seems to be a major source

How to engage families - flyers; what are key issues" - put issues out there

People need to engage with the port

Will port compete with existing businesses?

Don't like how town administrator makes them feel

Port seems to making a big sale job

Feel the port is being deceptive

Future town halls should be more community engagement, less presentation

Parks - Pioneer park does not seem kid friendly - more just "open spaces", natural, safe, non concrete

Protect the commercial picture as is

Living spaces above

Do not compete with existing ?

Tourists say - Small town life as it used to be

Crime, speeding, density - Be creative

Street festivals - Street to encourage people to come downtown started with

First on First - Idea - Close First Street to encourage people to come downtown

Sustainable water - Not enough > Paying too much for water

Green space - issue of snapdragon apartment

Town came to developer to suggest he build apartments - Concern with rock faces - water intrusion

Maple field - took away large space - where does parking occur; Parking encroaches on neighborhoods
Firehouse - trade parking for NW station
Not enough parking for businesses
Parking code goes by square feet and not number of bedrooms
Selling parking spots
Long standing parking problems
Had to remove stairs because of a setback two year ago - how not enforced?
Comp plan says every building must have "courtyard or open space"
Firehouse p encroached 2 feet into the row. - follow the rules
Planning director has all the authority
Mistakes errors are made
Changing parking code
Plan for Lime dock
Port - 60 foot building with volunteer fire department
Communication issues - decisions are made, importance not understood
Density - Town does not support young families
No affordable housing
School at lowest enrollment
Lost middle class
County adopted growth plan without considering residents
Planned residential neighborhood - town densifying to avoid Avalon
Last time affordable housing built was channel Cove in 1995
La Conner has always been family oriented
Kids do not have a place to play
Preserve field for soccer, baseball
Burlington has soccer fields
Nothing is happening to obtain parks, no action to get a field
Pandemic- Lots of things that should not have. Communication and transparency is a
Center Street - Nothing required to be submitted for permit
Density - No understanding of how growth is established - Need for follow-through
Landed Gentry- not enough parking and Houses too large
Push for transparency

Frustration with amount of development'/don't want La Conner to become a bedroom community

5 air B n B's - too many

Center Street - no enough parking

Moore-Clark - vacancy tax - BC - reduce foreign investors

Childcare not available

Traffic

Port Development?

Partnerships with Tribal Community

Family safe neighborhoods

Climate change

Industry drives jobs - if you build it they will come

Lack of housing - Encourage ADU's

Comprehensive Plan - Unknown to the public

Planning codes need examination and revision

Advisory group to reviewed proposed plans

Walkability of neighborhoods is very important

Not sure there is a way to create affordable housing without subsidizing

Money needed to promote infrastructure upgrades

Moral underpinnings of society is important to pay attention to

Port needs at least 40 million to do repairs

Housing on boats?

Potential of the Moore - Clark property?

Town needs to weigh in with port plans and limit any significant housing there

Value in clean energy - Town needs to reduce carbon consumption

Eye on the future - Need to set things up Cooperation and Partnership

Can we replicate something like the Cascade Landing housing option in La Conner?

Rent control

Parking is a long standing concern - can we have a shuttle option from big lots?

Value - walkability; resilient businesses; unique retail; school district; service clubs; new library; "Norman Rockwell town" - water; farming; historical nature

The town and port need resources - can the tribe help?

The tribe has partnered with the school district and library - can this be expanded?

Need more children - are young families interested in small town feel?

Housing too expensive

A survey with questions framed in the positive would get us ideas from the citizens

Need to preserve fertile farmland and active agriculture

Hard working town workers

Lack of transparency, accountability and communication (website)

Respect for the history, socio economic diversity - pushing people out

Sense of cronyism, decreased ethics, development supported over character

Need investment in community, open space, supporting families, surveyor values

Town determining what it wants not reactive

Diversity

Community Engagement

Prepare for climate change

Planner versus Planning Commission - What is the process

Livability - Safety, Density

People need a voice

Accountability - Budget needs more line item detail

Communication- How to engage families

Safety - Crime, Speeding

Green spaces

Parks - water input/output

Developers provide "affordable" housing within their development

Land title remains in trust to a non profit or public entity

Historic use permits - Less conditional use permits

Tiny homes do not meet this need

Strong council and Planning Commission - staff assistant to help

Communication with discussions - monthly potlucks; input from the citizens

Open communication with the community

The following (from Catie Ritchie) submitted after previous document prepared

Overarching theme: Shifting to thinking about what we DO want vs operating in reactive mode to proposed projects.

1. Public Safety

a. Crime

b. Walkability, bikeability. Need to focus on paths to destinations (School, store, etc.). Bring

Swinomish and Shelter Bay and how they access town into the equation.

c. Speeding

2. Livability

a. Preserve diversity. Economic. Political. Professional (farmers, marine trades, service

industry etc). Tribal/non-tribal.

b. Grow in a way that preserves why people moved here.

3. Accountability/transparency

a. "Feels like it is a green light to development". Need to remove the ability of the planner

to make subjective decisions. Need to build into the process that town council with community input has more say.

4. Communication

a. More events like the "Town Talk". Do that for specific issues (Port development, Maple

field, etc.)

b. Communication materials that are accessible to lay people.

c. Families. How to engage and include.

5. Parks

a. Pioneer Park is not a destination park for kids. It doesn't feel safe with Pioneer Parkway

and need to find a way for it to be more kid friendly.

b. Need more wild places for kids.

C.Ritchie ideas

1. Travel

- a. Need to focus on destinations (school, grocery, parks) and making them feel safe and comfortable.
- b. Speeding on Maple.

2. Communication

- a. Transparency - both perceived and real needs to be addressed.
- b. Use communication tools that make complex issues easier to understand, specifically for code and density issues.
- c. Families - How do we engage and include in the discussion?

3. Parks

- a. Parks - a place for kids to be wild. Undeveloped but safe.
- b. Encourage on-the-ground volunteerism

4. Density

- a. Homes for middle income.
- b. Cooperative housing?
- c. Homes for specific groups only - locally employed, artists, marine trades, farmworkers.

5. Culture

- a. Keep the rough edges. Not everything has to be polished to be beautiful and enjoyable.
- b. Look to other communities (in US and other countries) creative ways to maintain culture of the town
- c. Cultivate a respect of what has come before. Recognize that we all have our starting point in the community. Take time to learn where we have been to better understand where we are going.

6. Petty crime

- 7. Recognize the La Conner Community, not just Town of La Conner residents

a. La Conner, Swinomish, and Shelter Bay are part of the larger community and we need to think beyond our town limits.

8. Vision

a. Plan for what we want our community to be instead of constantly reacting to proposals.

Noted Themes:

Known vision and plan

Partnerships

Housing - Density; Affordability etc

Communication with Transparency; Accountability from Town Government

Preservation of historic town, open space, walkability, farmland

Public safety - Crime; Speeding; climate mitigation