

NORTHGATE OUTREACH

**For Seattle Department of
Planning and Development**

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**Report on
Focus Group
Findings**

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In the fall of 2012, the City of Seattle Department of Planning and Development (DPD), in collaboration with Public Health Seattle King County and the Growing Transit Communities project of the Puget Sound Regional Council, launched a focused outreach effort in Seattle’s Northgate neighborhood. DPD contracted with a consultant team of Tu Consulting and Judy de Barros to design and facilitate the outreach activities. This report describes the results of the project. It includes three sections:

- Purpose and Planning
- Who Participated
- What was Learned

This report provides more detail to a companion Powerpoint presentation titled, “Northgate Targeted Outreach Summary.” Additionally, a complementary document titled “Process Summary & Lessons” reviews the project process and outreach model, and lessons learned from it.

1. PURPOSE AND PLANNING

Outreach Purpose and Topics. The overall purpose of the project was to reach out to and receive input from neighborhood stakeholders underrepresented in broader planning efforts and events. Participants were asked their thoughts about community-wide Health and Livability, with focus on two specific topics: urban design and the light rail station.

On the topic of urban design, questions centered on two areas:

- How to achieve the Northgate Neighborhood Plan vision for the Urban Center, and
- How the Northgate Urban Center can grow in ways that support health and livability

On the topic of the light rail station, discussion focused on two general issues:

- How the station area can become a vital and attractive heart of the Northgate district, and
- How the station area can contribute to a high quality “people place.”

Outreach Sponsors and Approach. The lead agency sponsor of the outreach project was the City of Seattle Department of Planning and Development. Additionally, Public Health Seattle King County and the Puget Sound Regional Council’s Growing Transit Communities project collaborated and participated. The project was carried out from November 2012 through February 2013.

The outreach was designed around an approach that invited neighborhood-based groups to facilitate small discussion groups within their own communities or stakeholders. Where there was no community-based host available, discussion groups were organized directly by project consultants and agency staff.

2. WHO PARTICIPATED

14 focus groups were held from December 2012 through February 2013, and included a total of 152 participants who represented a diverse range of ages, race and ethnicities, gender, and backgrounds. The table below describes groups and participants.

Stakeholder Group	Neighborhood Facilitator/Host	#	Group Composition & Characteristics
Apartment residents	507 Northgate Residence	8	8 apartment residents, including 7 men/1 woman, mostly professionals, all recent residents of the neighborhood
Business & property owners	Consultant-organized	4	4 participants: 2 major property owners and 1 Chamber of Commerce representative
Eritrean community	HOPE Eritrean Social Services	13	13 men, women & elders, English-Tigrinyan discussion, after church
Health service employees	Group Health Cooperative & staff	3	3 Group Health employees
Faith-based community	Idris Mosque	15	15 Mosque members from throughout Seattle
Apartment residents/youth	Lake City Court/North Seattle Family Center (2 groups)	24	15 residents, including 9 East African immigrants, 1 Native American, 1 African American, 1 Caucasian, 1 Chinese, 1 Bosnian 9 youth, including 5 East African, 3 African American, 1 mixed race
Students	Middle College High School	10	10 students, 4 women/6 men; 3 African American, 2 Native American, 5 Caucasian
Native American community	Urban Native Education Alliance	10	10 Native American community members, 7 women/3 men, ages 30 to 70
Senior residents	Northaven Senior Community	16	16 residents of Northaven Senior Community
Students	North Seattle Community College	10	10 students and staff, residing in Northgate and throughout Seattle
Faith-based community	Olympic View Church	5	5 church members and local residents, 2 women/3 men, ages 50s to 80s
Young students/families	Olympic View Elementary	12	12 elementary school alumni and parents
Somali community	Techno Formation Vocational Services, Inc.	12	12 community members, 8 women/3 men, most live in Northgate or Lake City
Apartment residents	Thornton Place Residence	10	10 apartment residents, 6 men/4 women, most car-less, recent residents
	Total number of participants	152	

3. WHAT WAS LEARNED

This section describes input across all the discussion groups, and is organized into several sub-sections. **Neighborhood Activities** highlights the ways in which participants interact with or are active in the Northgate neighborhood currently. **Community-wide Health and Livability** includes five elements: Public Transportation, the Physical Environment, Affordable Housing, Personal Safety, and Community Services. For each element, participant input about strengths and areas for improvement are described.

Neighborhood Activities. Participants described different ways they are active in or interact with the neighborhood today.

Tiers of activities. Many participants described having a range of activities, which fall into two “tiers.” One level includes broader-scale or neighborhood-level activities that connect to and across many stakeholders groups. The most frequent of these types of activities include:

- Mall and shopping
- Public transit use
- Public/community facilities
 - Parks
 - Library
 - Community Center

At the same time, many said they participate in activities specific to their community or stakeholder group. For example, the Idris Mosque draws over 500 members to its services and activities on a weekly basis. Native American community members are active in numerous activities that take place at the Wilson Pacific School. Somali residents take part in a range of programs and services offered by community organization Techno Formation Vocational Services, Inc. Similarly, Eritrean community members frequently interact with HOPE Eritrean Social Services.

Links and activities beyond Northgate. In addition to activities in and around Northgate, many participants spoke of links to communities and activities beyond the neighborhood. These included:

- Refugee & immigrant communities : Eritrean and Somali participants whose communities are spread across Seattle and beyond
- Lake City: an adjacent neighborhood to which Northgate stakeholders are connected as residents, business owners, and business patrons, and users of community facilities
- Native American communities: links to Native communities beyond the area
- Faith-based communities: places of worship such as the Idris Mosque, whose members come from beyond the immediate neighborhood
- Commuters
 - Students and employees coming to neighborhood
 - Residents going to jobs beyond neighborhood

Community-wide Health and Livability. Groups identified several important elements of community livability.



Neighborhood strengths. Across these elements, participants repeatedly cited several important strengths or assets that the Northgate neighborhood currently has. These included:

- 1. Excellent public transportation.** Northgate is a major transit hub, with numerous bus routes to destinations in all directions and significant transit facilities.
- 2. Quality physical environment.** The current physical environment is a mix of diverse uses with both an urban and suburban feel. There are several newer buildings/development that contribute positively to neighborhood activities and physical space.
- 3. Affordable housing.** Housing is available for people and families with a range of different incomes.
- 5. Community services and amenities for everyone.** Participants cited the numerous shopping options available in the neighborhood, inside and around the Northgate Mall.

Areas for Improvement. Participants cited several areas of concern, summarized below and discussed in the following sub-sections.

- 1. Excellent public transportation.** It is essential to build a great light rail station, and improve transit service and accessibility.
- 2. Quality physical environment.** Creating more of a sense of place, and improving cleanliness and maintenance in the neighborhood are important.
- 3. Affordable housing.** There is a need to ensure adequate housing for future needs
- 4. Personal safety.** An increased sense of safety, particularly in key areas, is needed.
- 5. Community services and amenities for everyone.** Some services have shortfalls, and overall equity and City responsiveness in some services could be improved.

1. Excellent Public Transportation

Discussion about public transportation centered on three topics: light rail station area development, light rail station design, and transit services accessibility.

Light rail station area development. Most participants see the light rail development as positive, with a strong shared interest in avoiding negative effects.

Generally, participants wish to see a light rail station area that is safe, attractive, comfortable and offering desired services and amenities. Specific items cited included:

- A strong sense of place, station area feels and is “tied into” the neighborhood
- Amenities including plazas, green features, cafes, local retail, food vendors, ‘social commons’
- Affordable fares and fare system that is integrated across all transit systems
- Seamless bus transfers (coordinated times)
- Safe, secure, well-lit, inhabited areas in and around the light rail station
- Adequate park-&-ride capacity especially given the increase in volume of transit users

Groups described numerous things they want to avoid in relation to the new light rail.

- Increased traffic congestion. For example, one participant described, and others in one group agreed, how, “...on weekend evenings, people come for movies and parking is saturated. On game days (i.e. of Seattle professional sports teams), parking is saturated. The special event day buses are full.” There was concern about inadequate parking when light rail is added. Many participants worried that congestion will be particularly difficult as the Northgate station will be the end of the line until the light rail extends further north.
- Crime and security problems
- Poorly lit areas
- Lack of cleanliness, and proliferation of garbage
- An un-inviting pedestrian environment
- Noise pollution

Participants also wanted to be informed about construction. Said one group member, “If I know stuff is coming, I can organize and plan around it. Otherwise, folks get annoyed real fast.”

Light rail station area design. Participants shared many ideas for the physical design of the light rail station itself. These included design themes and qualities such as:

- Northwest Native American themes to signify cultural heritage and local identity
- Attention to native vegetation choices and complementary materials (stone), local character
- Water, wildlife, and glacial history themes
- European town square, main street, concerts in the park feel
- “New urban feel” - a modern setting

There were also design ideas about specific uses and features. These included:

- Sculpture garden, fountains that can be played in
- 'Social commons' – comfortable outdoor and indoor places for interaction (family-friendly)
- Features for healthy lifestyles, for example, walking
- Pubs, places for live performances
- Farmers market space
- Artist, social & community spaces; Native American museum/cultural center
- Places for start-up businesses, including ethnic or immigrant businesses
- Heated station, and shelter from the wind and rain

Improve transit services and accessibility. Public transit is an essential transportation link for many participants, who want to ensure service quality and safe accessibility. Prevalent concerns included:

- Need for more streamlined and efficient bus service and connections to other parts of the city
- More service on major bus routes
- A more direct routing to North Seattle Community College (such as the pedestrian bridge) would make it easier for students and college staff to choose light rail.
- Improve accessibility and service timing, to overcome the lost time and inconvenience of transferring buses. Many still choose driving over transit despite added cost to the driver.

Stated one North Seattle Community College student, *"I live in the U-District, but I find a 45-minute to 1 hour bus trip too much time wasted to use transit to NSCC, even though NSCC daily parking is not free."*

2. Quality Physical Environment

Participant thoughts about the physical environment primarily related to two aspects: creating or improving "sense of place" in the area, and improving cleanliness and maintenance.

Creating a "sense of place." Most group members want to improve Northgate's "sense of place" by adding activities and attractions to enhance character and destination. Their ideas included:

- Improve the physical environment to create places people want to be. Specific suggestions included parks and green spaces, grassy areas, streets that are lively and exciting, gathering spots and/or tourist destinations like a mini Pike Place Market, benches, buffering the freeway.
- More activities geared for families and youth. Examples mentioned included parks, creek trails, connecting all areas for foot traffic, more community center and library hours and space.
- Encourage local businesses, including: more lunch spots, coffee shops, street level stores, Trader Joe's, dry cleaners, Hobby Lobby, small restaurants, pubs
- Strengthen distinct identity of Northgate. Ideas included better signage, creek trails, strengthening "pride of place" and sense of destination.

Below is a selection of quotes from participants that captures the flavor of their thoughts and suggestions for improving the physical environment.

- *“When I take my kids to the park, we always go elsewhere, like Green Lake or Alki.”*
- *“Because it is geared to large retailers, Northgate feels less homey. I would rather see a collection of mom and pop shops added as the neighborhood grows.”*
- *“Change the area’s focus from business to people.”*
- *“I think of downtown Bellevue’s old Main Street and that big city park there near the mall. That area has walkable streets and shops, and is clean, which makes it a destination spot.”*
- *“You should be able to say, ‘Northgate – that’s the place with _____ [a special place or quality] where I like to go and visit.’”*
- *“My dream would be a distinctly Native American cultural center at Licton Springs that would be a great attraction for scholars, tourists, and members of all tribes.”*
- *“A feeling of getting between Point A and Point B without much in between.”*

Improve cleanliness and maintenance. Participants mentioned a number of public areas that need improved cleanliness and/or maintenance.

- Streets and sidewalks that are clean and safely passable
 - Sidewalks modernized – wide enough, smooth, ADA compliant
 - Any gaps in sidewalk network filled
 - Fix tripping hazards
 - Aesthetic streetscape improvements
 - Landscape maintenance
 - Traffic signals timed well for pedestrian crossing (including seniors) and vehicle traffic
- More attention to improving area’s appearance and neatness
 - The City should be more responsive to street cleaning, ditch/utility cleaning issues
 - Improve litter cleanup, parks appearance and civil behavior
 - More garbage cans along high traffic areas
 - Consider native landscaping treatments along streets

3. Affordable Housing

Focus group participants had one main concern related to housing: to **ensure adequate housing to meet future needs**. They wanted to know what the City of Seattle plans to do to retain existing affordable housing or encourage more of it as the Northgate Urban Center grows. Participants asserted that:

- Housing is important for active, people-friendly, destination-oriented places.
- Encourage affordable housing that serves workers in the area earning below median income.
- Affordable housing options would allow more people to enjoy a more socially connected and physically healthy lifestyle.

4. Personal Safety

Ensuring personal safety is a high priority and includes dimensions related to both traffic and transportation safety and personal security and crime.

Traffic and transportation safety. Related to traffic and transportation, participants primarily discussed pedestrian and bicycle safety. Groups wish to see more and better pedestrian connections to build a complete network that meets today's needs. They cited specific locations where sidewalk and/or other pedestrian improvements are needed. These include:

- Pinehurst Way NE and 15th Avenue NE
- NE 92nd St and I-5
- 5th Avenue NE and NE 100th Street, 5th Avenue NE and NE 95th Street (missing sidewalk)
- 5th Avenue NE and NE 105th Street (broken sidewalk)
- Expand signal timing to allow adequate time for seniors and children to cross
- 5th Avenue NE and NE Northgate Way (steep ramp)
- Midblock crossing from Northaven Retirement Community to post office
- NE 92nd Street and 1st Avenue NE (pedestrian safety)
- 5th Avenue NE and NE 95th Street (speeding vehicle traffic)
- NE Northgate Way crossings in general (More pedestrian circulation and scale)
- North of NE 85th Street generally (more sidewalks)
- Pedestrian overpass from Northgate Mall to Target
- Along 5th Avenue NE and Roosevelt Way NE (crossing safety)
- NE Northgate Way (need median to stop illegal lefts onto 5th Avenue NE)
- 1-way streets in Maple Leaf are a pedestrian hazard, need to open up NE 103rd Street
- Northbound left turn from 5th Avenue NE to NE Northgate Way (congestion)
- 3rd Avenue NE (need crosswalk to get to transit center)
- Safer walking areas crossing over I-5
- Along Thornton Creek east of 5th Avenue NE (improve corridor for safety and amenity value)

Suggestions for improving bicycle routes and rider safety included looking at 1st Avenue NE north of NE Northgate Way, and creating a bike pathway around Thornton Creek and north to Hubbard Park using internal streets.

Personal security and crime. Comments about personal security related to a general concern about improving overall sense of safety and security. Specific dimensions of this included:

- Need a special focus on ensuring safety in and around transit station
- Prune overgrown shrubs next to sidewalks, including overgrown shrubs on the west side of 5th Avenue NE on the way to target, and eliminating ivy and other invasive plants.
- Ensure adequate street lighting, with specific citation of need for lighting along 3rd Avenue NE going to Target and at the Beaver Pond.
- Address uncivil behavior on streets and in parks

- Drug activity
- Improve cultural competence in police response

Below are several quotes from participants reflecting some of their concerns about safety and security.

- *“We moved from the South End and want to make this community good for our families. But we have a problem now with police. They don’t respond to calls from refugees and immigrants... now we don’t feel so safe.”*
- *“Northgate’s been known for so long as a big parking lot with needles.”*
- *“People who come to shop at Christmas drive like maniacs.”*

5. Community Services and Amenities

Address shortfalls in services. Many participants expressed a need for key public services and facilities to be more available. Specific needs cited included the following:

- Libraries and community center: more hours, easier and free or affordable ways to use community center and library rooms, for personal or social service needs, year-round availability of community center programs for children (no seasonal shutdowns)
- Need more affordable or subsidized recreational programs for youth, such as:
 - Swimming, dance, day camps, mentoring
 - Expanded Teen Center (dance parties, computer lab, swimming), after school activities
 - Indoor play fields, sports venue, multipurpose gym – to get out of poor weather
 - More youth-oriented stores
 - Park space
 - Indoor sports facility/fields, places for youth to play sports
 - Arcade separate from mall
- Parks: picnic/barbecue spaces,
- More places for families to go. There were concerns about adequate facilities for diverse community activities and family-oriented gathering spaces.
- Food banks
- Daycare
- More availability of community support services
- Ways to bring together and engage youth and seniors
- Overall strong desire for a Somali Community Center in the area

Preserve affordability of housing and support services. Many participants, particularly refugee and immigrant community members, want to ensure affordability and equity in housing and support services. Their concerns included:

- Community services and programs
 - Need more affordable services for immigrant families
 - Adequate services: childcare, disabled services, other social services, immigrant support resources
 - More social services, especially on west side of I-5
 - Resources for parents in all languages
 - After school programs including Somali classes
 - YMCA or Boys and Girls Club
 - Senior activities
- Cultural competence in services (e.g. in police response, parent resources, after school programs)
- Affordability of housing and daycare

Below are several participant quotes related to community services and programs.

- *“A facility that would be able to accommodate several families with spaces for child care, after-school tutoring, youth center, and ESL.”*
- *“We hope that when it [Northgate] grows, it won’t become so nice and expensive that we will need to move because we can’t afford it anymore.”*
- *“There’s a huge homeless population, but there are no food banks, no shelters, no youth center, and no public restrooms.”*
- *“The combination of breaking the language barrier and developing job skills are vital for more persons to be able to effectively enter into community life.”*