

Envisioning an Indigenous Downtown Seattle

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ENVISIONING AN INDIGENOUS ➤ DOWNTOWN SEATTLE ➤



WHAT DOES A
VIBRANT, RESILIENT,
AND EQUITABLE
DOWNTOWN SEATTLE
LOOK LIKE FOR
INDIGENOUS PEOPLE? ➤

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Interviews were developed and implemented by Tahoma Peak Solutions (TPS) a Native woman-owned firm that tells stories and solves problems. TPS brings over 60 years of combined experience in Indigenous problem-solving and storytelling. TPS is committed to building a better future for Indian Country.

LISA WILSON

SEATTLE, WA

BS, MSW, PHD STUDENT

LEAD CONSULTANT, TAHOMA PEAK SOLUTIONS

Lisa@tahomapeak.com

810-931-6645

Lisa Wilson is a Contractor with Tahoma Peak Solutions focusing on research, evaluation, training, curriculum development, and technical writing. She is an enrolled member of the Muckleshoot Indian Tribe. She is currently pursuing her PhD at the University of Washington's College of Education, focusing on the impacts of land-based education on the holistic well-being of students, including their physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual health. Lisa holds a Master's Degree in Social Work with a concentration in Children, Youth, and Families, and a Certificate in Interpersonal Trauma from the University of Denver and a Bachelor's Degree from Olivet Nazarene University. She is a founder and board member of FEED Seven Generations. FEED's mission is to revitalize the health and wellness of tribal communities by amplifying the voice of Native people, reconnecting to ancestral community health practices, and elevating land management strategies. Her areas of expertise are in Indigenous research methodologies and theory, qualitative

research, technical writing, and culturally sustaining curriculum and professional development.

While working as the Director of Curriculum and Instruction for her community, the Muckleshoot Indian Tribe, she led curriculum development efforts for a land-based learning program in locations of their usual and accustomed lands. These included forestry operations managed by Manulife, State Parks, and the Crystal Mountain Ski Resort. This curriculum aims to support student's interaction and engagement from and on their ancestral lands. She also led an early childhood through high school curriculum project that focused on building social and emotional skills through the teachings of traditional plants. These lessons included land-based learning experiences, language integration, traditional stories, and experiential learning opportunities. The curriculum was also coupled with expansive year-round professional development for teachers that supported appropriate and respectful implementation and curriculum fidelity. Recent research projects have utilized Indigenous research methodologies to explore how Muckleshoot Tribal Members understand and experience health and well-being and explore Indigenous food systems in the Portland area.

VALERIE SEGREST

ENUMCLAW, WA

BSN, MA

CEO & COFOUNDER, TAHOMA PEAK SOLUTIONS

valerie@tahomapeak.com

For more than a decade, Ms. Segrest has dedicated her work in the field of Nutrition and Human Health Science towards the efforts of the food sovereignty movement and catalyzing food security strategies rooted in education, awareness, and overcoming



barriers to accessing traditional foods for Tribal communities throughout North America. By utilizing a community-based participatory research approach she has worked to organize tribal community members in grassroots efforts towards strengthening sustainable food systems that are culturally relevant and nutritionally appropriate.

Ms. Segrest earned her Bachelors Degree in Human Nutrition and Health Sciences from Bastyr University and her Masters of Arts Degree in Environment and Community from Antioch University. Over the years, she has earned several certifications in advanced herbal studies and has extensively researched the subject of historical and traditional food and medicine systems of the Coast Salish tribes of Western Washington.

Her career began as a faculty for Northwest Indian College and as a Cooperative Extension Agent for the Traditional Foods and Medicines Program. In 2009, she worked with her community to launch the Muckleshoot Food Sovereignty Project, a grassroots effort toward increasing access to traditional foods within the Muckleshoot community by identifying food resources, developing and implementing culturally appropriate curriculum focused on traditional ecological knowledge. Over the span of ten years, Ms. Segrest has co-authored several publications including the books “Feeding Seven Generations: A Salish Cookbook” and “Indigenous Home Cooking: Menus Inspired by the Ancestors.” She was a Kellogg Food and Community Fellow at the Institute of Agriculture and Trade Policy. This afforded her the opportunity to share the efforts of the food sovereignty movement with audiences locally, nationally, and globally. Further, she made several important connections to the broader good food movement and key leaders in that arena. In 2019, she was featured in the Women’s Day Magazine, the Food Network Magazine, and the J.Jill “Inspired Women” Campaign. In 2022, she was a judge on the Hulu Network’s reality food show, “Chefs vs. Wild.”

SPECIAL THANKS

Special thanks to our interview participants. We are honored that you shared your stories, wisdom, and experiences with us. We hold them with the utmost delicacy and respect. Thank you for your time and trust. Big thanks to Arundel Books for their continued partnership, support and generous use of space.



KEY FINDINGS

The findings emphasized several key areas for reclaiming space, narratives, and partnerships, as well as planning for the future and addressing current challenges.

RECLAIMING SPACE

In terms of reclaiming space, it's crucial to honor the original landscape and involve Indigenous people in shaping the city's design. This includes increasing representation in art and construction projects and creating a more welcoming environment.

RECLAIMING NARRATIVES

Reclaiming narratives involves promoting accurate Indigenous histories and visibility in public spaces. It's essential to educate both the public, Indigenous youth, and city employees about Indigenous culture and heritage.

WORKING TOGETHER

Working together requires strengthening partnerships between Indigenous organizations, tribal nations, and city government. Genuine collaboration and resource transfer are essential for supporting equity and Indigenous initiatives.

INDIGENOUS INPUT

In planning, a long-term city plan that includes input from Indigenous groups is necessary. Addressing foundational issues and adopting innovative housing approaches are also crucial.

ENCOURAGING INNOVATION

Encouraging innovation means removing restrictive systems and incorporating diverse community perspectives in city planning efforts.

EXPANDING PROGRAMMING

Expanding programming for youth, promoting Indigenous entrepreneurship, and addressing the impact of the pandemic are essential steps for a more resilient downtown.

CONSERVATION

Conservation efforts should prioritize protecting land and waters, implementing habitat restoration programs, and educating the public about environmental issues.

SAFETY

Addressing safety concerns, including crime and issues related to the unhoused, are vital for creating a safe environment downtown.

THINKING 7 GENERATIONS AHEAD

Thinking seven generations ahead involves emphasizing sustainability and collaboration to ensure community resilience and prosperity for future generations.

HONORING TREATIES AND RESPECTING TRIBAL SOVEREIGNTY

Lastly, it's crucial to honor treaties by respecting Indigenous sovereignty and rights, ensuring fair treatment by state institutions.



INTRODUCTION

WHAT DOES A VIBRANT, RESILIENT, AND EQUITABLE DOWNTOWN SEATTLE AREA LOOK LIKE FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLE?

It's a big question that invites dreaming and imagining ways of being beyond colonial confinements. Dreaming of an even more joy-filled future for our people, community, lands, waters, and all of our animal relatives. These terms might seem synonymous, but when our team broke down this question into three separate questions, we found a rich tapestry of experiences, ideas, dreaming, and passion. Our respondents represent a roster of leaders who conduct business, offer services, and develop youth programs for Indigenous people and by Indigenous people in the downtown subarea. Their answers are a beautiful example of Indigenous ways of knowing, demonstrating interconnectedness and standing alone in their specificity.

AS WE REFLECT ON THESE THREE WORDS, **VIBRANT, RESILIENT, AND EQUITABLE**, THEY INHERENTLY REFLECT MANY OF OUR INDIGENOUS VALUES.

We are vibrant, or full of energy, enthusiasm, and life! The hearty laughter of an auntie, the deep vibration of a drum during pow wow, the vibrancy of a new salmonberry blossom reaching and stretching in the springtime sun. We are resilient, or able to withstand and recover from difficult conditions. The wise steady eyes and beautiful lines within our Elder's faces speak to a lifetime of learning and persistence. The salmon people moving with consistent tenacity

as it pushes and jumps upstream, inspires us to also fight for the return of life. We are an equitable people. We understand and honor the nuance of each of our relatives and their unique circumstances, needs, and strengths. We honor these nuances and respond to these needs appropriately so we can all thrive, and we do so in our own unique way. From freshly cooked food and cedar roses gently and intentionally woven for a funeral to the joy and laughter of holding a new baby that was recently brought into this world. We wrap around each other in times of crisis and celebration. You'll see and hear these values echoed through the words and ways of thinking in our respondents. You'll also see an invitation to integrate these values into our collective dreaming of what the city of Seattle could look like. As we reflect on these words,

MAYBE A BETTER QUESTION TO ASK IS, "WHAT DOES AN INDIGENOUS SEATTLE LOOK LIKE FOR ALL?"

One of our participants said Indigenous people are powerful allies in city planning because stewarding these lands and waters is not just an interest, it's a "birthright", it's "why we have been put here." In the words and experiences of our participants, you will feel that passion and purpose that embolden them with urgency, concern, creativity, and hope for future generations of relatives to come.

COME DREAM WITH US!



BACKGROUND

CITY OF SEATTLE REGIONAL GROWTH CENTERS

The City of Seattle's Planning and Development Department is undertaking a neighborhood planning effort for its six regional growth centers—Downtown, Capital Hill/First Hill, Northgate, South Lake Union, Uptown, and the University District. The Planning Department is committed to including the perspectives of under-resourced and underrecognized populations and understands that relationship building, sharing power, and diverse leadership must be involved in the planning effort. In 2023, they began working with Tahoma Peak Solutions, a Native woman owned consulting firm to develop an inclusivity guide focused on Indigenous groups, provide cultural safety trainings with their department staff to better understand the history and goals of the Indigenous community, and conduct research with Indigenous leaders in the downtown area to gather insights to inform the development of policies to ensure that urban centers can successfully accommodate future growth and become more equitable, vibrant, and resilient. They are also gathering feedback from all sub areas as phases of the project become relevant. They wish to focus investment and implement tools guided by each community's interests and visions for its future to respond to community-identified needs.

HISTORY OF RESEARCH WITHIN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

Indigenous communities have experienced a harmful history of research conducted upon, and not with, them. Western research practices have been used as tools of Settler Colonialism to erase Indigenous peoples in the pursuit of securing land (Wolfe, 1994). These practices used Western ways of knowing,

theories, and methods that don't align culturally with Indigenous peoples (Tuck, 2009; Smith 1999). This lens casts Indigenous people in a negative light through amplifying deficits, misrepresentation, extraction of rich cultural information, and exclusion (Tuck, 2009; Smith 1999). This slanted and biased perspective justified the removal of Indigenous people from their lands and the erasure of Indigenous people by creating and reinforcing oppressive systems and structures (Tuck, 2009; Smith 1999). These systems and structures are both overt, like boarding schools or the adoption system, and subvert, like the continued erasure experienced within the education and mental health systems today. These practices have caused substantial historical, intergenerational, community, and individual trauma, harm, and a deep justifiable mistrust of research processes and institutions for many.

The truth is Indigenous people have always been researchers. The process of using observations and information to make informed decisions to meet the needs of our community is not exclusive of Western thought or systems. We have always observed and read the land and waters. Noted what we saw, and developed or adapted sophisticated skills, practices, tools, and technologies to ensure our community's survival. We were, and are, innovative and adaptive people, contrary to the stagnant portraits of our people that are often seen in the media.

Today, we enact research and data sovereignty by using Indigenous theory and methods through community-driven processes to explore questions and identify solutions. We foster authentic and accurate information and honor and respect our community's knowledge and traditions as valid and legitimate data sources. Data sovereignty works to decolonize research practices, systems, and structures. This project is both a celebration of the rich knowledge and experience our participants hold to answer important questions and an intentional step toward decolonizing research practices.



CONSIDERATIONS WHEN WORKING WITH INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

FLAT POWER STRUCTURE

Foster trust by providing opportunities throughout the process for engagement and partnership. This could include providing input on methods, research design, member checking data and findings, and gathering input on how to disseminate information best.

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL TO CONTRIBUTE

It's important to create opportunities to hear from all voices and personality types. Some Indigenous people might be shy and would prefer not to share in front of a large group. Offer opportunities for large group discussion, but also offer opportunities for follow-up one-on-one conversations.

ENGAGEMENT

Many Indigenous people are thoughtful, intentional speakers. Offer ample wait times for participants to finish their thoughts. Don't rush a speaker through their thoughts. Also, carefully consider the size of the group. Keep large group discussions to ten or under. Using visual engagement strategies like writing on a board can be helpful too. Share the questions beforehand and create space and opportunity for participants to reflect and collect their thoughts before sharing.

INDIGENOUS LEADERSHIP

Indigenous people can bring important knowledge and lived experience to the research process. It's important to honor that knowledge and experience by prioritizing Indigenous leadership within research projects.

BE A CONSIDERATE HOST

If you're asking people to gather and take time out of their day and other responsibilities, be a thoughtful host as a reciprocal act of appreciation for their participation. This could include providing food, snacks, compensation for time, childcare, offering multiple days and times to accommodate schedules, and/or offering locations that work best for participants. Gifting is an important practice in many Coast Salish communities as an act of appreciation.

RELATIONSHIPS

Ideally, asking someone to participate in a research study or project shouldn't be the first time they're meeting you. Instead, intentionally develop strong reciprocal working relationships with Indigenous people as a reflection of your organization's commitment to the original care-takers of the land you occupy.

METHODS

We held lived histories closely, as we planned and implemented the Envisioning an Indigenous Downtown Seattle project. It is a Native-led research study informed by many community-based participatory action research principles in its design and methods. We selected this approach because it honors those who are directly impacted by a research question or issue as most equipped to identify effective solutions and supports community-led transformation and social change (Burns, Cooke, & Schweidler, 2011). It honors that these individuals and communities hold rich and valid insights that can inform plans for strategic action (Burns et al., 2011).

It's grounded in the practical and relevant needs and concerns of a specific community, in this case, Indigenous leaders in the downtown Seattle area (Burns et al., 2011). The project also focuses on a specific place and its relationship to that place (Burns et al., 2011). It is also relationship-driven. The project drew upon existing relationships to build upon and further expand trust and rapport in the hopes to also further relationships and enhance collaborations. Trust and shared power is also demonstrated through communication, follow-up, data transparency, and engaging with participants in a reciprocal way.

The project enacted Indigenous methodologies aligned with the community's culture and ways of knowing. Oral traditions, including storytelling, are important cultural practices within Indigenous communities to share knowledge and histories (Archibald, J., Xiem, Q., Lee-Morgan, J.B. J., De Santolo, J., 2019). Storytelling is relational in nature and offers rich opportunities for collaboration and strengthening cultural practices to support deeper, richer, and fuller understandings (Archibald et al., 2019). The project used individual interviews, with some conducted over a meal of traditional foods.

The project and interview questions utilized a strength-based approach. It began with a broad, open-ended question regarding the ways participants envisioned a vibrant, resilient, and equitable Seattle for Indigenous people. This encouraged participants to dream and imagine a future with no bonds. Then participants were guided through follow-up questions as needed.

The study drew upon narrative inquiry methods which focus on story as the basic unit of analysis, paying special attention to the story's content and how participants articulate their life experiences through story (Bhattacharya, 2017). The project used a constructivist grounded theory approach as the method for data analysis using inductive open coding (Bhattacharya, 2017; Smith, 1999). The coder analyzed the stories using in vivo coding to construct categories that contribute to the development of a theory (Bhattacharya, 2017). Once the categories were established, the coder used member checking to create a shared data analysis experience and ensure that the codes and categories align with the participant's interpretations. The data analysis process resulted in a theory rooted and understood from the words and experiences of the participants (Harding, 1994; Bhattacharya, 2017). This method challenges histories of western research within Indigenous communities in which western concepts and understandings were placed upon, rather than determined by, Indigenous communities. Member checking positions participants at the center of the research and ensures coding and categories are accurate (Bhattacharya, 2017).

The eight participants were leaders who conduct business, offer services, and develop youth programs for Indigenous people and by Indigenous people in the downtown subarea. All participants were in their



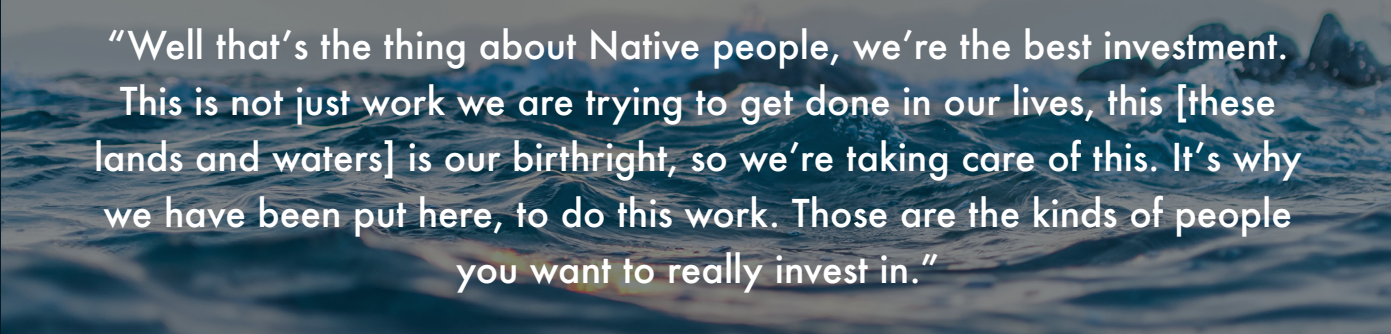
30's and 40's and represented both males and females. All participation was voluntary. The project invited a diverse set of Indigenous people to a focus group. Due to scheduling challenges, only one participant was able to attend. A rich and expansive conversation followed. It was because of this conversation, that the team decided to pivot and conduct individual interviews so each participant had the space and time to share their thoughts and experiences on the research questions. This method dug deeply into their experiences through three key questions. All participants were given the same questions with a list of possible follow up questions before the interview and had time to reflect on the questions before the interview (Archibald et al., 2019). The group lasted anywhere from 20 minutes to an hour. The interviews were audio recorded to analyze later. Interviews were recorded on an iPhone, using the Otter.ai app. Otter.ai processed the recordings into transcripts. After the audio was uploaded, the coder listened to the audio recordings while reading the transcript and scrubbed the transcript of errors. Next, the transcript was

downloaded into a Word document. A coder used the "comments" feature to code the transcript using in vivo coding (Charmaz, 2001; Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014). The codes were organized into a Word document, where relevant direct quotes and summaries were placed under the codes. After the first interview, some codes were grouped with similar codes and/or into categories. (Charmaz, 2001; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The same process was used for the second interview. The codes were then merged along with identifying additional categories. The code was then used to code interviews three through five. Additional categories and codes emerged in each interview and were added. After the fifth interview, the codes were organized under broader themes that became the headers for the finding section. This process was an intentional methodological choice to prioritize and honor the participant's voices. A draft of the final document was sent to participants for an additional opportunity for member checking and feedback before finalization.



2023 Canoe Journey Landing at Muckleshoot in Seattle with downtown in the background

FINDINGS



“Well that’s the thing about Native people, we’re the best investment. This is not just work we are trying to get done in our lives, this [these lands and waters] is our birthright, so we’re taking care of this. It’s why we have been put here, to do this work. Those are the kinds of people you want to really invest in.”

FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLE, CARING FOR THE LANDS AND WATERS OF WHAT IS NOW CALLED SEATTLE IS NOT JUST AN INTEREST. THESE LANDS AND WATERS ARE THEIR BIRTHRIGHT AND PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY, THIS MAKES THEM STRONG PARTNERS AND ALLIES IN CITY PLANNING.

RECLAIMING SPACE

All participants spoke about how the reclamation of space is vital to a vibrant, resilient, and equitable downtown Seattle area for Indigenous people. But it’s important to note that Seattle is Indian Country now. This is despite colonial attempts to control and own. Participants discussed the many ways the current downtown area reflects and reinforces white colonial dominance. “Western culture is recognized everywhere, through modern structures and buildings.” Instead, another suggested considering what the original architecture, plan, and landscape was as a roadmap to move forward.

Participants spoke about the importance of increasing

“Native flavor” downtown by increasing Indigenous representation in art, built environment, architecture, design, spaces, places, plants, and landscape, and involving Indigenous people in the design process. They wanted more inclusion in art and cultural events as well as inclusion in entrepreneurs and companies bidding and construction opportunities. One suggested more Indigenous fixtures and inclusion on projects like the revitalization of the waterfront.

One spoke about the need for the city to feel more welcoming for Indigenous people through design. They suggested design elements like benches, seating, plants, and trees. Noting that it appeared places were intentionally designed to discourage people from gathering. “And it’s just really criminal to pull those things [benches] away to punish people-there should be public seating.” Examples of locations they said felt welcoming to Indigenous people were Winnipeg, Minneapolis, New Mexico, Arizona, Albuquerque, and Phoenix.

Some spoke specifically of increasing Muckleshoot and Suquamish leadership and cultural presence as “essential for a thriving downtown for everyone.” They believed this wouldn’t just positively impact the Muckleshoot and Suquamish but “would be good for urban natives as well.” When considering reclamation and implementing policies that support and celebrate Indigenous people, it’s important to



realize that it's not just good for a single Indigenous nation, but Indigenous people at-large and the whole population. This sentiment is heard often in Indian Country. For example, clean water, protecting the salmon run, swiftly locating our missing relatives, tending to our unhoused relatives, creating spaces to gather and laugh, are policies that benefit us all.

Participants suggested the importance of acquiring space and property to expand housing, businesses, and nonprofits for Indigenous people. Others spoke directly of land back movements and called upon King County and the City of Seattle to look at land holdings, buildings, and piers and return them to the Muckleshoot and piers to the Suquamish people. The land could be developed for businesses and/or offices for government-to-government relations with the Muckleshoot people.

Many spoke of the need for an Indigenous gathering space in the downtown area to gather, rest, eat, and engage in social and political activities. Many spoke to the challenges of accessing Daybreak Star, which is not accessible by public transportation. Many organizations were interested in hosting events or had a desire to build a conference center or gathering space in the future.

"RECLAIMING THIS [THE CITY OF SEATTLE] SO PEOPLE REALIZE THAT THIS IS INDIAN COUNTRY, RIGHT?...I KNOW IT MAY NOT BE A RESERVATION, BUT IT DOESN'T GET MUCH MORE INDIAN COUNTRY THAN RIGHT HERE."

RECLAIMING NARRATIVES

Beyond reclaiming physical space, participants spoke of the need to reclaim accurate narratives and histories at the risk of erasure. They stressed the importance of Indigenous people and organizations needing to be more visible. They wanted to promote more interactions directly with Indigenous people as a way to learn more about the area, which stresses the importance of relationships and the practice of oral traditions in education. One participant wanted to see more information about the 29 federally recognized tribes in Washington State, but most spoke within the context of the Muckleshoot people, and one spoke of both the Muckleshoot and Suquamish people.

Participants had many suggestions for increasing Indigenous visibility. Many wanted more public campaigns that shared tribal history, culture, and language through story and storytelling. One suggested an Indigenous boat tour that shared Indigenous history. Many spoke to adding signage, using audio, leveraging technology like apps, and developing a QR program to learn language and history. These projects would support people to learn place names in the language and share history around culturally significant people and places. One suggested having a memorial for Indigenous fishermen who died fishing along the Duwamish. Multiple participants gave the example of the historical panels at Daybreak Star which have photos and historical information as an exemplar of these efforts. Another pointed to public facing partnerships like the Muckleshoot Indian Tribe with the Seahawks, Mariners, and Kraken which helped foster public awareness. It was important that these visibility projects were

WORKING TOGETHER

“BEING ABLE TO TELL YOUR OWN HISTORY IS A POWERFUL THING. THAT’S ALSO RECLAIMING SPACE- THAT’S HEADSPACE, AIR SPACE, STORY SPACE.”

accessible to the general public, but participants stressed that it was very important to maintain the correct spelling and phonemes of the traditional language. One suggested using an Indigenous owned studio to record stories, audio, plays, and podcasts. This reflects having Indigenous people involved in all steps of the creation and development of educational materials.

The audience for these projects were both non-Indigenous and Indigenous people with many speaking about the importance of Indigenous youth knowing their history. One desired more clarification on the histories and nuance of the Muckleshoot Indian Tribe and Duwamish Tribal Organization in order to, “set the historical record straight for people so that there is a reliable source that can tell that accurate history.” Others also stressed the importance of those working in city government to know these histories. “People working in government should learn accurate history and understand the role they play in continuing or re-establishing relationships with Native communities.”

Many Indigenous serving organizations spoke to how they are serving primarily Indigenous people who are not local and suggested a 411 program for Indigenous people to improve communication and awareness about available programming, resources, services, events. “All the things you need to know, if you’re a Native person in the urban city.”

Many want to see stronger partnerships with all stakeholders involved in the city including: Indigenous organizations, businesses, federally recognized treaty tribes, neighboring tribes, and city government.

Many had suggestions of ways the city could improve its partnerships with Indigenous organizations and nations. One said it was difficult to gain traction on initiatives because the city was reactive to “the social issue interest of the month.” Another spoke to the financial and reporting burdens of city contracts. Another spoke of the frustrations of negotiating with the city. “They come to the table. They already have a plan. They’re wasting our time. They’re checking the box and wasting our time. I’ve been to three or four meetings. ‘Well what do you think? Well we’ve already been working on this. So you’re calling us to the table to check the box.’” Also not feeling like there are strong advocates to continue to support and advocate for the best interest of Indigenous nations, organizations, and people once they leave meetings. “But it’s just every conversation I’ve had for the last twelve years falls on deaf ears...We don’t have anyone advocating after we walk out of the room.” One spoke of how truly understanding the reality of the human need and being responsive and reflective of that in policies. Another stressed the importance of transferring power and resources in order to support equity. “If you want to do true equity work, you have to do two things-transfer resources and then transfer power. And if you’re not willing to do those two things then just get out of here. Let’s do it on our own. I’ve had enough of this. I don’t want to have you knocking on my door anymore say[ing], ‘How can we serve your people better?’ I don’t care. Yeah, we’re doing just fine. Stop hoarding the resources.”

“I THINK AT THE CORE OF EQUITY IS THIS REALITY OF THE HUMAN NEED.”



One participant felt the rise in Land Acknowledgements was an opportunity to build general awareness which could hopefully foster longer and deeper relationships between local Indigenous organizations and businesses. Another suggested working groups with Indigenous organizations and allies would be helpful to address policy and planning barriers.

In terms of collaborations between urban Indigenous organizations, one participant highlighted the ways systems are designed to create competition and lateral violence, “Systems are designed to get us off course. And that’s what we have to remember. It’s designed to pit us against one another and that’s why we have to fight that every day.” Instead others stressed the importance of working together. “We need each other, we each serve roles, and where we can figure out that we need each other, it’s going to make it that much more efficient and effective.” Participants suggested supporting collaborative relationships by ensuring each organization had a clear vision and goal and stayed focused on it. This would help avoid mission creep and chasing money. Participants leading Indigenous organizations wanted to see more integration of services and wrap around services in collaborations with other Indigenous organizations.

PLANNING

Many participants believed a long-term detailed city plan was needed to support a vibrant, resilient, and equitable Indigenous community in downtown. One wanted to see a specific plan to develop more of the Duwamish river area. They felt the city had difficulty moving beyond needs assessments and community engagement towards an actionable plan. This resulted in the city continuing to “look backwards” and focus on disparities. One participant suggested creating a small pragmatic and disciplined group to flesh out goals based off of the assessments and community engagement work that has already taken place. Many participants stressed the importance of including reps of city Indigenous organizations and

local tribal nations in any city planning conversations. “Right now there isn’t any, right now the city only cares about accommodating business people who come in and leave at 5:30.”

One participant felt the lack of a strong “starting point” with foundational systems like transportation firmly in place, resulted in difficulties building and expanding the city with new initiatives like building a walkable city. It also caused new initiatives to have unintended consequences that negatively impacted other initiatives and aspects of the city.

INNOVATION

Many participants suggested innovation as a way to respond to the pressing needs of the city in order to cultivate a vibrant, resilient, and equitable downtown Seattle for Indigenous people. One saw the opportunity post pandemic as an opportunity to innovate and be a global leader. Many participants spoke of the ways current systems stifle equity and innovation. “So it’s just like those paternalistic oppressive racist systems, quite frankly, that are inflicted upon us. If you were able to remove that restriction from the building, what could you do?” Participants spoke about the ways the desire for power and control hinder innovative problem solving. “I would say, at the heart of it, there is, you know, a desire for power and there’s folks who have dictated what downtown Seattle is going to look like for a long time. And they need to be humbled and step back and make room for a new way of envisioning downtown.”

One specific example participants discussed was housing. Participants suggested considering new ways to build housing considering how building standards and materials are expensive and not sustainable. Instead finding other ways to innovate, and encourage innovation, in the housing space. “Why couldn’t there be a beautiful longhouse on the waterfront that was basically SRO [single room occupancy] housing where people have individual rooms and share a bathroom, or have their own bathroom, but share a

INNOVATION

bathroom, but share a living and kitchen space.” Participants spoke about how limiting building and zoning regulations were in regards to housing and their own plan for expansion. These limits stifled business development, innovation, and the ability to respond to the needs of the community. “I think it’s time to change regulations, find ways of ensuring affordable housing is really being lifted up, build and evolve from different structures already downtown.”

One organization developed a comprehensive strategic plan that included policy, advocacy, workforce development, community enterprises, communication, program expansion, business incubator, and protecting intellectual property. They suggested adapting a more systematic and interconnected approach could benefit city planning efforts.

They also spoke about the importance of having voices at the planning table that aren’t typically included. “Give room for innovation and understanding to communities of color, Native communities, Black communities and allow them to make big mistakes and not be incredibly successful in the eyes of colonized white society. Our ideas of success are going to be very different. Change those metrics and standards which are rooted in white supremacy and keep people in bondage. Give dollars back to communities of color and let them go and see what kind of beautiful things can happen. Participants believed including diverse communities perspectives and ideas on health, wellness, and housing could promote the future prosperity of all through planning and the built environment.

Many spoke to the unoccupied spaces in the downtown area. One participant spoke about the importance of developing a plan that came up with new ways of renovating these spaces. “Bring voices that have not traditionally been involved in those

“I THINK IF SEATTLE CAN HAVE A VISION AND UNDERSTAND THE OPPORTUNITY, WE CAN TEACH THE REST OF THE COUNTRY AND EVEN THE GLOBAL COMMUNITY WHAT A NEW DOWNTOWN COULD LOOK LIKE AND WHAT IT IS AND HOW IT COULD REALLY MEET THE NEEDS OF EVERYONE, NOT JUST THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY AND PEOPLE RICH ENOUGH TO LIVE IN THE DOWNTOWN.”

planning spaces. What can you imagine in the space? How can we understand new ways of housing?”

Many discussed the Pioneer Square area. One spoke about the negatives to centralizing services for the unhoused all in one neighborhood because the need is throughout the city. It’s also challenging because the area lacks other services to support this group. Diversification of the neighborhood through businesses, companies, shopping, commerce, and groceries would better support the unhoused and encourage more residents and businesses in the area. One said the area wasn’t very “family friendly,” but was hopeful that a new childcare program would encourage people to return to the area which would help the neighborhood.

Other innovative ideas participants suggested were an Indigenous transportation system and expanding PDA. Two participants spoke about the ways a PDAs, or public development authorities, hinders development and expansion of services. Another idea includes developing a marina at Duwamish, Shilshoe, or Elliot Bay because the current marina has problems servicing the fleet the size that it is.



PROGRAMMING

Participants also spoke about expanding or developing programming to support a vibrant, resilient, and equitable Indigenous community in the downtown area.

One area multiple participants discussed was the need for more youth programming. One discussed bringing local Indigenous youth living on reservations into Seattle to take part in programming that city organizations offer or participating in summer programs. They also suggested offering programs where youth and Elders could travel to historical sites and youth could share stories and learn Indigenous history from Elders. They could also work to develop traditional stories and history into plays and audio recordings. Another suggested expanding youth programming on the environment that was credit-barring and provided job shadowing in the hopes of connecting them with life experience and possibly college degrees. One stressed the importance of youth having real-life experiences around climate change in order to better advocate when put in leadership positions later. These programs could also help leverage both traditional knowledge and western science, but they need to ensure that collaborations are handled respectfully and adequately compensate Indigenous participants. “Okay, that’s it and everything else is gone [climate change’s impact on fishing]. That’s it and we’re not going to let it die, but we need help. And we need not only help with funding, we need help to get our people out there to comprehend and understand what is going on.

“I FEEL LIKE THIS CITY CAN LEARN A LOT IF INDIAN COUNTRY PULLED TOGETHER TO ADDRESS THINGS LIKE HOUSING INSECURITY, FOOD INSECURITY, AND TRANSPORTATION NEEDS.”

“THESE KIDS ARE GOING TO BE SITTING IN FRONT OF FUTURE PRESIDENTS AND CONGRESSMAN. THEY NEED TO KNOW WHAT THEY’RE THINKING. IF YOU DON’T HAVE EXPERIENCES OR JUST BEING THERE [OUT ON THE LAND AND WATERWAYS] AND SEEING THE CHANGE POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE, YOU WON’T BE A GOOD POLICYMAKER.”

The science of today needs to be meshing with our Traditional Ecological Knowledge. They want all of our knowledge, but they don’t want to support a life of dignity for our fishers.”

Another talked about the risk of starting business for many Indigenous people. Many Indigenous people are scared to start a business because they need capital and have come from poverty and it’s a big risk, it could put you back into poverty or homelessness.



PANDEMIC

Many spoke of the ways the downtown area was “suffering” due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the abundance of empty commercial space. One respondent thought that the lack of a workforce in-office downtown impacted economic development in the neighborhood.

Many pointed to the ways Indigenous communities were resilient throughout the pandemic. One believed it was because “we’ve been without for so long.” One attributed the quick and effective response came from a real fear of “losing Elders, relatives, loved ones. It sparked a remembrance of our resiliency in the downtown space.” Another believed it was time to shift energy from just surviving to thriving, “We were resilient because it was necessary-survivor mode. Next movement is about prosperity and business opportunities.”

Many believed that partnering and looking to people and organizations could help move the downtown area to a new future. “Indigenous people need to take control of the narrative of what a downtown should be in order to move towards a future post pandemic. “There’s a desire for downtown to be what it was before the pandemic, but the reality is, is that we need to be clear that I don’t think that’s ever going to come back and I think that’s ok. I think that downtown Seattle was not always great for Native people and Native businesses.”

“WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT RESILIENCY, I THINK ABOUT NATIVE PEOPLE. WE HAVE EXHIBITED THAT DOWNTOWN THROUGHOUT THE PANDEMIC.”



CONSERVATION

"HE'S CONSTANTLY CONCERNED ABOUT A LIFETIME OF WHAT IT MEANS IF I'M PULLING A NET UP ON MY BODY OVER AND OVER AND OVER AGAIN, THAT'S JUST BEEN DREDGED IN TOXINS."

When asked about what would make a vibrant, resilient, and equitable downtown area, many spoke about the importance of protecting our land and waters. One spoke of the impacts climate change has had on increased water temperatures, lower oxygen in the water, increased flooding, higher water levels, and concerns for properties along the shoreline.

They also spoke of the impacts of pollution on land, water, fish, and tribal fishers. For example the way barges contaminate the water and the lack of response, "But there's several times that this whole dock will be encased in oil. And it would be an environmental call and someone would have to come try and clean it up. If it gets as bad as it seems on some days, and it just gets ignored. And then it gets on the rocks. The low tide gets it on the rocks and it washes off." The impacts of pollution also impacts the fish runs. Streams the Coho travel through the west channel. "As soon as they go in that drain they roll over and die. It's the runoff as soon as it rains. All the poisons and stuff. It's amazing what percentage of fish run through a little stream. How it represents the overall system. It can be a good number." They also spoke of the environmental impact of Pier 91 development and Elliot Bay Marina on the kelp and salmon run and the expansion of commercial fishing and recreational boating. The population increase in Seattle also impacts sewage and water quality. More vehicles, concerts, and action along the waterfront also negatively affects the water and land quality and harms tribal fishers. "And they're not very good

about telling everyone, hey there's a fishery."

The pollution impacts tribal fishers as well. The contaminants in the water affect their health who also bring it home to their families and children.

Suggestions of ways to better combat these issues were programs that protected steelhead, designating areas along the Duwamish as Superfund Sites to open up EPA funding opportunities, increasing plant filtration and protecting and creating more kelp, increasing habitat restoration efforts including protecting plants and planting cedars along the shoreline, creating studies to examine the impact of ships on kelp and including Indigenous youth so they can gain firsthand experiences with the impacts of climate change, practice collecting data, and use the data in educational programs to pursue degrees. Another idea was developing an educational curriculum on water and shoreline restoration, educating commercial and recreational boaters as well as the coast guard on fishing and treaty rights to combat people running through nets and harassing tribal fishers by sports fishermen.

"I DON'T KNOW. I LOOK AT THE CITY AND WHEN YOU TALK ABOUT RESILIENCY, AND IT'S GOT TO BE A PLACE THAT PEOPLE FEEL SAFE TO WALK. IT'S GOT TO BE A PLACE OF BEAUTY. IT'S GOT TO BE A PLACE WHERE WE'RE PROUD."



SAFETY

Many spoke about the importance of addressing safety issues in order to support a vibrant, resilient, and equitable Indigenous community downtown. One noted that if you push crime out of one area, it ends up somewhere else. Another noted that the increase in empty buildings and revolving businesses created less consumers, taxpayers, and taxpaying businesses. They believed this contributed to an increase in violence, and boat, trailer and fence damage. Another noted that an influx of tribal fishers unloading at the same time with limited space is also a safety concern. They also noted an increase in frequency of boats running through tribal fisher's nets.

The unhoused was another popular theme among participants. One noted that the issues downtown also impacted neighboring reservations as well. They believed some of the illegal activity that some unhoused engaged in was brought back to the reservation. One noted some camps had built an economy of sex work, drugs, wire stripping, and boat and bike theft and believed the city should have a heavier hand when crimes or activity interfered with the local economy. Others felt like the city should do more to support the unhoused and have seen a lack of adequate support, service, and mental health dollars since the 80's. Though participants had varying viewpoints on the best response to the unhoused population. Many recognized it was a persistent

issue that impacted a vibrant, resilient, and equitable Seattle area for Indigenous people. One spoke very powerfully about the psychological impact of existing in this way and the lack of response by both the city and individuals. "They say, one of the worst things about being homeless is the cloak of invisibility that society puts on you. They walk by you and don't even notice you. Don't even notice your existence, your presence. Don't want to look at you. Don't want to acknowledge you and so it's very lonely and isolating."

Another theme was law enforcement. Some saw a lack of police presence and support on Puget Sound to support tribal fishers, "They're focused on the lake. They won't come out and respond or help at all. You get no help. You're just literally out there alone. The only other people that help are other fishermen that will come by and you know, or chase them [people who run through tribal fisher's nets] down and scream at them. It's insane." A tribal nation lost a tribal fisher and felt there was little support from the city on search and rescue efforts. It took law enforcement 48 hours for someone to finally arrive. These sentiments reflect larger systemic issues and concerns around the missing and murdered Indigenous men and women epidemic. One participant noted the lack of law enforcement support aligning with the increase in the fish run and fleet. Another felt there needed to be further discussions and clarification around jurisdiction. They felt tribal needs were not a priority and there was little communication.

"WE WERE THERE WHEN KING COUNTY CAME UP AND CAME OUT FOR A WHILE. AND THEY SAID THEY'D BE BACK AND THEN THAT WAS LIKE THREE OR FOUR DAYS LATER...FISHERMAN WERE DRAGGING NETS TRYING TO HELP FIND THE BODY...HARBOR PATROL, COAST GUARD, SEATTLE POLICE AND FIRE, NO ONE HAD THE TIME."



7 GENERATIONS

Many emphasized the importance of thinking seven generations ahead and focusing on sustainability to ensure a resilient, vibrant, and equitable downtown Seattle for future generations. They stressed the necessity of organizations accessing resources for continued financial sustainability and building generational wealth to ensure their organization and ultimately community's resilience and stability for years into the future. They recognized a need to mobilize people and resources, but noted the difficulty of the constant stream of new nonprofits popping up as opposed to working together to build upon the strengths and organizations that already exist. This phenomenon contributed to a scarcity mindset around resources. Some brought up ideas of trying to create ways for passive income like parking lots. One encouraged organizations to "think more like a business," and organize community hedge funds, consider economic development opportunities, and develop a social enterprise incubator. Another suggested neighboring tribes consolidate tribal giving to push into one cause.

"We're
not going
anywhere."

HONORING TREATIES

Finally, one participant discussed that they felt state institutions weren't honoring the rights of Indigenous nations. They were overstepping sovereignty by shutting down tribal fishing or trying to collect taxes on activities related to fishing. "They don't honor the treaties." These comments show that there is further work to do to ensure tribal sovereignty and rights are maintained and protected into the future.

"No one in the office understands that we think generationally, right? We're thinking the next seven gens, right? What are they going to be up against? What are they going to be facing? How do we get them prepared for that? Hard concept for the office to understand. So I'm trying to. Well that's because we're here in perpetuity. We need to explain to people we're not going anywhere. You think about seven generations, because we're just not going anywhere. We're just like that mountain up there. You're not digging it up and moving it. Yeah, it's been here for 1000s of year. So are our people. We're not going anywhere."

RECOMMENDATIONS

◀ RECLAIMING SPACE

Consider the original architecture, plan, and landscape as a roadmap for future development.

Increase Indigenous representation in art, built environment, and design in the downtown subarea.

Involve Indigenous people in the design process and construction opportunities, including projects like the waterfront revitalization.

Make the city more welcoming for Indigenous people through intentional design elements like seating and green spaces.

◀ RECLAIMING NARRATIVES

Promote accurate Native narratives and histories through public campaigns, signage, storytelling, and educational materials.

Ensure Indigenous visibility in public spaces and partnerships with organizations like sports teams to foster awareness.

Provide accurate historical education for city government employees.

◀ WORKING TOGETHER

Strengthen partnerships between Native organizations, treaty tribes, neighboring tribes, and city government.

Ensure genuine collaboration and support from the city rather than token gestures.

Transfer resources and power to support equity and Indigenous initiatives.

◀ PLANNING

Develop a long-term city plan with input from city Indigenous organizations and local tribal nations.

Address foundational issues like transportation to enable future initiatives.

Encourage innovative approaches to housing and zoning regulations to support Indigenous communities.

◀ INNOVATION

Encourage innovation to address pressing needs in the city and remove restrictive systems.

Support diverse community perspectives and ideas, particularly from communities of color, in city planning efforts.



◀ PROGRAMMING

Expand youth programming to include cultural education, environmental awareness, and job opportunities.

Support Indigenous entrepreneurship with access to capital and resources.

◀ PANDEMIC RESPONSE

Partner with Indigenous people and organizations to shape the future of downtown post-pandemic.

Acknowledge that the pre-pandemic state of downtown was not always beneficial for Indigenous communities.

◀ CONSERVATION

Prioritize protecting land and waters to combat climate change and pollution.

Implement programs for habitat restoration, pollution control, and environmental education.

◀ SAFETY

Address safety issues downtown, including crime, homelessness, and law enforcement support.

◀ THINKING SEVEN GENERATIONS AHEAD

Emphasize sustainability and building generational wealth to ensure community resilience.

Encourage collaboration among organizations to maximize resources and impact.

◀ HONORING TREATIES

Ensure state institutions respect and honor Indigenous sovereignty and treaty rights.

Implementing these recommendations can contribute to a more vibrant, resilient, and equitable downtown Seattle for Indigenous communities and all residents.

CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

The team conducted five interviews of seven participants, which is a small sample size.

The interviews were conducted by two Muckleshoot Tribal Members and the conversation centered on the downtown area which is the usual and accustomed land of the Muckleshoot people. Our positionality as Muckleshoot people conducting interviews regarding our U and A could consciously or subconsciously impact respondents' responses to interview questions.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the findings from our discussions draw strong parallels to Indigenous Planning Values and Guiding Principles outlined in the Indigenous Inclusivity Guide. Those include relationality, respect, reciprocity and responsibility. In our comprehensive examination, strategies for reclaiming space, narratives, and fostering collaboration in downtown Seattle present a compelling roadmap for a future that is more vibrant, resilient, and equitable. The recommendations outlined provide a framework for not only honoring Indigenous histories and cultures but also for building stronger, more resilient communities that benefit all residents of Seattle.

One of the key themes that emerged from the findings is the importance of centering Indigenous perspectives in the planning, design, and development of the downtown area. By increasing Indigenous representation in art, architecture, and design, and involving Indigenous peoples in the decision-making process, the city can begin to undo the erasure of Indigenous voices and reclaim space that has been historically marginalized. Through intentional design elements such as seating and green spaces, the city can also create a more welcoming environment for Indigenous peoples, fostering a sense of belonging and connection to place.

Furthermore, promoting accurate Native narratives

and histories through public campaigns, signage, storytelling, and educational materials is essential for challenging stereotypes and misconceptions about Indigenous peoples. By ensuring Indigenous visibility in public spaces and partnerships with organizations, the city can foster greater awareness and understanding of Indigenous cultures and histories among residents and visitors alike. Providing accurate historical education for city government employees is also crucial for promoting cultural competence and fostering respectful relationships with Indigenous communities.

Building genuine partnerships between Native organizations, treaty tribes, neighboring tribes, and city government is essential for ensuring that Indigenous voices are heard and respected in decision-making processes. This requires not only token gestures, but also the transfer of resources and power to support equity and Indigenous initiatives. By developing a long-term city plan with input from Indigenous organizations and tribal nations, addressing foundational issues like transportation, housing, and zoning regulations, the city can begin to address systemic barriers to Indigenous communities' well-being and prosperity.

Encouraging innovation and creativity in addressing pressing needs in the city, such as safety, pandemic response, and conservation, is essential for building a more resilient and sustainable downtown. By supporting diverse community perspectives and ideas, particularly from communities of color, the city can harness the collective wisdom and expertise of its residents to create innovative solutions that benefit everyone.



Expanding youth programming to include cultural education, environmental awareness, and job opportunities, and supporting Indigenous entrepreneurship with access to capital and resources are critical for building generational wealth and ensuring community resilience. Prioritizing the protection of land and waters to combat climate change and pollution, addressing safety issues downtown, and honoring treaties are also essential for building a more vibrant and equitable downtown Seattle for Indigenous communities and all residents. In conclusion, implementing these recommendations will require sustained commitment, collaboration, and resources from city government, Indigenous organizations, tribal nations, and community stakeholders. However, the potential benefits are significant—a downtown that is not only more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable but also more vibrant, resilient, and culturally rich. By reclaiming space, narratives, and fostering collaboration, downtown Seattle can truly become a place where Indigenous peoples thrive and all residents feel a sense of belonging and connection to their community.

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BY
LISA WILSON
AND VALERIE SEGREST

