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Subject: Neighborhood Hubs Community Engagement

What is a Neighborhood Hub?

Neighborhood Hubs are gathering places where residents have easy access to goods and services close to their homes. They are places where neighbors create meaningful relationships with each other. Hubs will vary in size and intensity, with some as small as a neighborhood tool library and others as large as a cluster of mixed-use buildings with housing above shops and services.

Role of Community Engagement in Neighborhood Hubs

Community engagement was essential to the development of the Neighborhood Hubs vision, and it remains a critical component of successful Hubs implementation. Future engagement will build on a strong foundation of engagement dating back to 2016. This memo details past engagement and proposes future engagement strategies that can help ensure successful Hubs implementation.

Past Engagement

[In 2017](#), the City Council adopted the [Milwaukie Community Vision & Action Plan](#) at the conclusion of a city-wide engagement process that began in 2016 and included participation of more than 1000 residents. City Council incorporated Neighborhood Hubs into the action plan. Engagement included a Vision Advisory Committee (VAC), 15 community events, 20 stakeholder interviews, 28 community conversations, four web-based surveys, two town halls, three place-based workshops, seven VAC meetings, and five city leadership meetings.

Between 2018 and 2020, the city conducted another round of Hubs engagement, ultimately integrating Neighborhood Hubs into its [2040 Comprehensive Plan](#) and developing recommendations for future Hubs implementation. This work focused on where hubs could be located, what services and amenities are desired, and how the city can support the development of hubs. Hubs-specific engagement included 15 Neighborhood District Association meetings and a community survey of approximately 396 residents, 85% of whom “Strongly Support” or “Support” the Neighborhood Hubs concept. This engagement identified 13 Neighborhood Hubs and eight priority strategies for future Hub implementation.

Gaps in Past Engagement

While previous Hubs outreach was extensive, the city did not make significant efforts to engage Milwaukie’s BIPOC communities. BIPOC means people who identify as Black, Indigenous, or People of Color. Because demographic data was not collected for participants in previous outreach efforts, current staff have limited knowledge about the diversity of participants in past engagement efforts. Much of the 2018 and 2019 Hubs outreach efforts occurred through the city’s Neighborhood District Associations (NDAs). While NDA participation in Hubs outreach has been valuable and beneficial throughout the project’s history, NDAs tend to underrepresent BIPOC communities and other historically underrepresented communities. Additional city efforts are necessary to ensure that a broad diversity of Milwaukie residents can guide project implementation and benefit from project outcomes.

Since 2010, Milwaukie's population has grown by approximately 4.6%. Much of this growth can be attributed to increases in Milwaukie's BIPOC communities. Milwaukie's Latino/a/x population increased approximately 36% since 2010¹ according to the US Census Bureau's 2017-21 ACS estimates (to around 1960 people). This data suggests Milwaukie's White alone (not Hispanic or Latino) population is approximately 80.6%. This means about 19.5% of Milwaukie's population identifies as BIPOC—approximately 4,089 people out of 21,108 people. Additionally, roughly 9.4% of Milwaukie residents under 65 live with a disability—around 2,000 people (or more considering seniors with a disability).

Adjusted for inflation, incomes in Milwaukie have decreased approximately 7% since 2000 and median household incomes in Clackamas County are about 30% higher than Milwaukie's. The poverty rate in Milwaukie is approximately 8.6%. Residents in Milwaukie are slightly younger than Clackamas County as a whole, with a median age of 40 compared with 42 for the county. Milwaukie has a larger share of people 20-39 years old and a larger share of people over 60 compared to the Portland region. Milwaukie has been deemed a severely rent burdened city where 26% of renters are spending more than 50% of their income on housing costs. About 38% of households overall are cost burdened, spending more than 30% of their income on housing costs alone.

Opportunities and Challenges for Equitable Community Engagement

Gentrification and Displacement

The Neighborhood Hubs project has several equity dimensions. Given that the intention of the Neighborhood Hubs project is to improve livability and access to desirable amenities, Hubs may have a gentrifying effect on neighborhoods. Gentrification often results in increased costs for housing and commercial rents which may displace existing residents and businesses. To reduce the likelihood that gentrification leads to displacement, the city can design its economic development and affordable housing strategies in a way that directly benefits those residents and small businesses who are at risk of displacement. To achieve equitable outcomes in the Hubs project, it will be critical for the city to engage small business owners, renters, BIPOC communities, and low-income homeowners to understand and meet their needs throughout Hubs implementation.

Distribution of Hubs

Some existing hubs are bustling commercial centers with dozens of businesses while other proposed hub locations are small tracts of vacant land or are occupied by businesses that do not include desired Hubs uses. Some Hubs have adequate infrastructure to support safe bike and pedestrian travel, while others are deficient in one or more areas. Each neighborhood has at least one Hub location, though the two Hub locations in Lewelling are far less developed than some of the more developed Hubs in Hector-Campbell, Ardenwald, Linwood, Lake Road, and Island Station. In 2020, the city hired consultants who identified priority Hubs based on their likelihood to develop in the next 7-10 years. There are significant gaps where there is no identified hub—particularly from central Lewelling to central Ardenwald as well as much of central Linwood. Since Hubs are not distributed equitably, this provides a difficult dilemma when prioritizing city actions to help Hubs grow. To achieve equitable outcomes, community engagement should explore opportunities to support Hubs development at all stages of growth and in all neighborhoods. This includes everything from emergence of entirely new Hubs to the mixed-used development of existing commercial-only Hubs.

Few Milwaukie-specific Community-Based Organizations

Partnerships with community-based organizations (CBOs) are often a critical component of equitable

¹ Demographics cited come from 2017-2021 American Community Survey Census Bureau estimates

community engagement. CBOs with existing relationships in underrepresented communities can act as a trusted liaison for project-based community engagement. CBO participation can help diversify engagement and improve outcomes for underrepresented communities. While there are many CBOs serving Clackamas County or the Portland region generally, very few CBOs limit their geography to Milwaukie's five square miles of land area. The city also has limited resources to fund the participation of larger CBOs that serve wider geographies. In recent years, the city hired an Equity Manager and developed an Equity Steering Committee who have focused on building relationships with BIPOC communities, people with disabilities, and other underrepresented communities. While these efforts have been productive, they are in the early stages. It takes significant, sustained time investment to build trusting relationships and networks before they can be seamlessly connected to project-specific engagement. Neighborhood Hubs is a long-term project that will evolve over the next 20 years or more. If sustained, committing even small amounts of time to authentic relationship-building with underrepresented communities will continue to benefit the Hubs project—and other city projects—into the future. Most importantly, it will help ensure equitable outcomes for those communities.

Lessons Learned from Past Engagement

In recent years, the city has made several attempts to engage underrepresented communities. Internal discussions about these past outreach efforts have revealed some key learnings to integrate into the next phase of Hubs outreach.

- The City needs to build and nurture its own relationships with underrepresented community members. Past projects have relied on consultants for the bulk of community engagement activities. Consultants are often hired for engagement processes, but their efforts are more transactional, ultimately ending when the projects end. This makes it difficult to carry those relationships forward and for the city to follow up meaningfully with participants. In many ways, it's like starting over again. For the city to succeed long-term with engagement of underrepresented communities, it must shift the responsibility for ongoing engagement from consultants and toward its own staff.
- Outreach is often siloed and organized by project. Yet building relationships requires building trust—a process that starts with authentic listening and without an agenda. Project timelines struggle to accommodate the relationship building that is necessary for engaging Milwaukie's full diversity. City staff should meet people where they are—whether that's a cup of coffee on their porch, visiting a local PTA meeting, or attending a meeting of a local CBO. Underrepresented community members must be engaged well ahead of time so that they can be plugged into appropriate projects as they arise based on their self-identified interests. This kind of relationship-building should be coordinated city-wide while leveraging opportunities where projects overlap.
- Community engagement fatigue is a significant problem in Milwaukie given its small population and geography. It is easy to see connections between Neighborhood Hubs and projects like the Transportation System Plan or the city's efforts to explore assuming full control of its parks. Coordinated outreach shows the community that the city values their time, and it can help the city reach more people with fewer resources. Coordination across projects also helps ensure that the city is building on these relationships over time. Providing things like food, interpretation, translation, and childcare also helps to reduce barriers to participation for underrepresented communities. Other incentives like gift cards or raffle prizes are proven motivators for increased participation.

Potential Strategies to Engage Affected Communities

Effective and meaningful engagement should be organized around the proposed strategies identified in

the 2020 summary report. The next phase of outreach will help the city refine the Hubs concept and proposed locations while exploring the feasibility of proposed Hubs strategies in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic. The final section of this memo focuses on potential strategies to engage affected communities—underrepresented communities, small businesses, and property owners.

Underrepresented Communities

There are many opportunities to meet people where they are. Collection of anonymous demographic information will be critical to evaluating the success of this outreach. Some strategies include:

- Redouble efforts to engage existing CBOs in Milwaukie to establish and/or deepen relationships. This could include attending the meetings of groups like Black Lives Matter Milwaukie, visiting places of worship that serve immigrant populations like the Ukrainian Bible Church, connecting with the PTAs of local schools like El Puente elementary, and collaborating with service-based organizations like the Wichita Center and NW Family Services. This type of outreach must begin early and is particularly well-suited to initial interviews, focus groups, and pop-up activities like surveys at existing organization events. Other collaboration opportunities could include the distribution of online surveys and posted flyers for the populations they serve. Online tools like Peach Jar, offered by the public school system, can help the city connect directly with the parents of school children in Milwaukie. This outreach can help the city understand where to invest in connecting infrastructure and what types of events would be desired by residents. These efforts can build toward creating truly diverse city-wide events later in the project.
- The city can also engage underrepresented communities through more general outreach. Since BIPOC communities in Milwaukie are more likely to be renters, canvassing and flyer distribution at select properties with low-income renter households has the potential to yield significant results. Many property management companies are willing to distribute flyers electronically or physically to their residents. This could include outreach to independent senior living facilities to ensure senior participation in the project. Intercept surveys at popular hub locations and local transit stops during busy times can be a valuable tool for understanding who utilizes hubs and how. Providing a small gift card incentive can boost participation rates for people who have limited time to engage. The city's Equity Steering Committee is developing relationships with Milwaukie's BIPOC communities and could be a valuable resource for feedback on engagement strategies and for connecting project staff to underrepresented community members.

Small Businesses & Property Owners

The development of existing Hubs is highly dependent upon property owner buy-in. As a result, property owner engagement will be critical at all stages of the project. In addition, the presence or absence of Hubs activities will be dependent upon the willing participation of existing businesses.

- Initial mailings to property owners and businesses can help set the stage for the project and offer opportunities to complete a survey or conduct an individual interview. Where contact information is available, phone calls to property owners will likely have a higher success rate than mailings. Given the potential for competition between property owners and businesses, interviews and confidential surveys may be more successful than focus groups for this population. Understanding plans for future development or sale, barriers in the zoning code, and other dynamics will be critical for developing effective zoning changes that can facilitate hub development.
- Direct phone calls, emails, and canvassing of existing businesses in Hubs within ¼ mile of established boundaries can help the project team understand the willingness of business owners to

engage in Hubs activities through surveys and/or interviews. This engagement is critical for right-sizing economic development programs meant to stabilize and grow existing businesses. This engagement should also focus on Milwaukee's many home-based businesses to better understand the barriers and opportunities that Hubs may create for growing this business type. This includes a focus on zoning strategies and could include raising awareness of increased flexibility for commercial uses resulting from recent changes to the city's high-density zones. Many small businesses face barriers to expansion to a brick-and-mortar establishment, something that accessory commercial uses, pop-up events, and expansion of allowed temporary uses may help mitigate.