

MEMO

To: Members of the HEC Committee
From: Andy Micklow, Links to Opportunity Senior Planner
Date: December 4, 2017
Subject: Links to Opportunity Round I Outreach Summary

This memo summarizes key takeaways and suggestions for future engagement from the Round I Outreach consultants: Downtown on the Go, Sound Outreach- Hilltop Action Coalition (HAC-Links), and Tacoma Housing Authority. The full reports are available for download on the Links to Opportunity website (cityoftacoma.org/links).

Background

Three consultants – “HEC Groups” – were contracted with to assist the City in connecting with hard to reach communities and populations, to inform these populations about the streetscape design process, and connect them to the AHBL outreach team and project staff. The HEC Groups were not funded as part of the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) grant or match; the contract period was July to October 2017.

Downtown on the Go

The overarching approach to Downtown on the Go (DOTG)’s outreach was to “go where the people are” and to capture input from “the people who use the corridor.” To do so, they utilized four outreach strategies during the contract period - pop-up placemaking, traffic calming, tactical urbanism, and speak up trainings - to engage more than 250 people along the MLK corridor and on South J Street.

The following key themes were identified by Downtown on the Go during their community outreach:

- Pedestrian safety and improvements;
- Bike safety and improvements;
- Seating and landscaping; and
- General neighborhood concerns/comments.

Community members expressed concerns about ADA accessibility and pedestrian safety at crosswalks; the speed of drivers and location of tracks on MLK; pavement and landscaping maintenance; and homelessness and gentrification – respectively. Community members also desire more clearly delineated and property signaled crosswalks; designated bike lanes and bike parking; appropriately-sited plants and landscaping; and support for business during and after construction.

Sound Outreach - Hilltop Action Coalition (HAC)

The Sound Outreach-Hilltop Action Coalition conducted community outreach through the HAC neighborhood leader network, community meetings, and social media. The HAC-Links working group was created and holds regularly monthly meetings to discuss the streetscape design project and larger community concerns. The HAC-Links project manager also conducted individual interviews and coordinated resident engagement at community events like the Hilltop

Street Fair. The following key themes were identified through community outreach and engagement with residents:

- Design elements that encourage gathering and creating shared community spaces;
- Desire for functional elements such as wi-fi, charging stations, and bicycle parking;
- Concerns about design elements in relation to issues of homelessness and crime;

An online survey was also created to gather feedback about streetscape design elements. The survey used materials from Walker|Macy's "Streetscape Design Concepts." The complete results are available in the consultant report and are encompassed in the summary above.

In addition to feedback on design themes and elements, community members also expressed concerns over community voice being integrated into the design process and concerns over rising rents, displacement, and community character. The City of Tacoma was awarded technical assistance by the FTA and Smart Growth America to look further into these issues.

Tacoma Housing Authority

Tacoma Housing Authority's (THA) outreach process drew on the "Housing Hilltop" Discovery report and from additional community engagement meetings. Four focus group meetings were conducted over a single day, with sessions targeted as specific interest groups. The process was designed to assess community needs within the following five categories:

- Pedestrian improvements such as crosswalks, lighting, landscaping, and alley activation;
- Parking;
- Accommodation of local small business both during and after construction;
- Connection between the neighborhood and local employers; and
- Various other concerns of local stakeholders.

Residents expressed concerns around lighting, accessibility issues, and streetscape maintenance on the MLK corridor. Suggestions for improvements included improved lighting, design elements that ensure universal access to the Hilltop neighborhood, and the incorporation of local art into design elements. Parking is also a concern during and after construction. Suggestions to address these concerns include residential parking zones and commercial parking limits along MLK. Residents are also concerned about a lack of gathering spaces – specifically exterior seating along MLK – and the number of retail vacancies. There is a desire to create a space for gathering along the corridor. This is a consistent theme throughout the Round I outreach – the desire for communal gathering spaces. THA also highlights the need for youth spaces and youth engagement in the community. The streetscape report also highlighted the importance of connecting MLK with the larger Hilltop neighborhood. Suggestions for improvements include the alley between MLK Way and South L Street to create a pedestrian area and possible festival street and additional pedestrian improvements along the east-west streets. A key theme from Tacoma Housing Authority's outreach was the prioritization of 'functionality over fancy.'

Recommendations for Future Engagement

Downtown on the Go recommends that on the street outreach should continue for the remainder of the project. Specifically, they identify tangibly testing out/discussing potential streetscape

elements to invite more informed feedback and hosting conversations in public spaces so that people can engage more easily and without a large time commitment.

Sound Outreach – Hilltop Action Coalition recommends that “residents must become a part of the process not just recipients of it” (pg. 33). They recommend additional grassroots engagement that is informed by community participation and action.

Tacoma Housing Authority recommends continuing engagement with renters and property managers. Creating a “buzz” around projects is important, but difficult to do in a holistic or authentic way.