

Healthy Homes, Healthy Neighborhoods

Wapato Lake Sustainability Pilot Initiative Executive Summary

Office of Environmental Policy and Sustainability

Christina Zinkgraf



The Healthy Homes, Healthy Neighborhoods Wapato Lake Pilot Initiative (WLPI) began in the winter of 2012, following the success of Tacoma’s recently implemented Every-Other-Week (EOW) Garbage Collection “Knock and Talks.” **In these talks, program representatives went door-to-door in North and South Tacoma discussing the change in solid waste pick-up, as well as answer any questions residents may have.** This groundbreaking project sought to determine if such success could effectively and affordably be replicated with more intense, direct outreach, promoting multiple sustainability programs and incentives; programs that could potentially save residents money on everyday household expenses while simultaneously improving the health of their home and neighborhood. Over ten organizations located throughout Tacoma and Pierce County participated in this 10-month pilot project, each with their own goals, programs and resources (in-kind and monetary). Partners included:

- City of Tacoma
 - Office of Environmental Policy and Sustainability
 - Environmental Services
 - Solid Waste Management
 - Evergreen Tacoma
 - Tagro
- Pierce Conversation District
- Puget Sound Clean Air Agency (PSCAA)
- Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department
- Tacoma Public Utilities: Power and Water
- Metro Parks-Tacoma
- InSinkErator: Private Waste Disposer Manufacturer¹
- Northwest Leadership Foundation
- Tacoma Farmers Market

Pilot Location

Several considerations were made when determining the location for this pilot, as the programs and incentives to be promoted were not limited to a particular area in Tacoma or Pierce County. Ultimately, nearly 2,000 homes that surround Wapato Lake in the South End of Tacoma were chosen as the location (Photo 1), based on the strengths and needs unique to the area.

The identified strengths of this community include an ownership rate of over 70%, an established community mobilizing program (Safe Streets), and the recent revitalization of the historic Wapato Park by Metro Parks-Tacoma. Because the WLPI sought to increase participation in community programs through door-to-door canvassing, it was essential to enter into a community with strong, established community presence and engagement.

With the average income of the region nearly 10% less than that of the city's and a long history of air and water quality concerns, residents in the South End stood to benefit greatly from the money saving, sustainability programs included in this project.



Photo 1: Map of Healthy Homes, Healthy Neighborhoods project area, with boundaries S 56th St – S 76th St and I-5 to Yakima Ave in South End Tacoma (zip code 98408)

Partner Programs and Incentives

Most of the sustainability programs and incentives of the project already existed, but were underutilized in this neighborhood. Each program had the potential to help residents save money on everyday household expenses and improve the health of their homes and neighborhoods.

Examples of these programs and incentives include:

Puget Sound Clean Air Agency (PSCAA)	Wood stove replacement program
Environmental Services and Pierce Conservation District	Rain garden host program
InSinkErator	Free garbage disposal
Tacoma Power	Weatherization and free CFL's
Tacoma Water	Water efficiency kit
Evergreen Tacoma	Coupon for discounted tree
Tagro	Coupon for free loading of Tagro
Tacoma Farmers Market	Free ingredients for organic meal
Metro Parks- Tacoma	CHIP-In volunteer program

Methods

To develop this project, the City of Tacoma acquired a full-time AmeriCorps member through the Northwest Leadership Foundation in the spring of 2012. In addition, a part-time City of Tacoma intern was hired to assist. By employing an AmeriCorps member to lead, the overall cost of the project was significantly lower than if a full-time employee were hired through any of the partner organizations. Furthermore, with several organizations involved, the individual cost to participate was relatively low, with many partners contributing in-kind, instead of monetarily. This project was successfully completed within a budget of \$20,000.

Several advertising and outreach methods were utilized in this project, with the most extensive being door-to-door canvassing. Every one of the nearly 2,000 occupied homes within the project area was visited at least twice during this project². Information was gathered from the conversations and used to form a series of workshops and community based on the needs of the residents. All events were kept local, utilizing partner and community resources.

To advertise and communicate with residents, direct mailings were used in addition to canvassing. A postcard was sent to every household explaining the project and alerting residents to the upcoming presence in their neighborhood. Furthermore, electronic readerboards (Photo 2) that are generally used to alert motorists of construction or road closures were placed along busy roads, informing residents that we would be canvassing. Individual emails collected through conversation, community presentations, monthly Safe Streets meetings, social media and partnering organizations were also used to communicate with residents.



Photo 2: Readerboard positioned along Sheridan Ave alerting residents to our arrival in their neighborhood



Photo 3: City of Tacoma intern in conversation with one resident

Results

Overall, residents were very receptive and welcoming to canvassers; often inviting them in their home to get out of the rain, or offering a chair to sit on while they spoke. Those programs that helped residents save money directly such as PSCAA’s Wood Stove Replacement or weatherization programs interested residents more than other programs such as tree coupons or volunteering. Although this result was not revealed through quantitative methods, every partner felt that intense, comprehensive, and sustainable outreach was an effective and affordable means of promoting their individual programs and incentives.

Canvassing Results	
Conversation³	534
No Conversation⁴	1390
Days Canvassing	55
Hours Canvassing	237
Total Time in Conversation	87 Hours
Average Length of Conversation per Resident⁵	9.8 Minutes

Products Distributed to Residents	
Compact Fluorescent Light Bulbs	3,260
Water Efficiency Bags	785
Tagro Coupons	170
Tree Coupons	137
Farmers Market Invitations	113

Program Participation and Redemption	
Individuals who Received a Free Garbage Disposer	94
Farmers Market Invitations	50
Interested in Hosting a Rain Garden	23
Replaced Woodstove	18
Water Reviews Conducted	13

Number of Volunteers⁶	Volunteer Hours⁷
19	546.5

Lessons Learned

A large benefit to the design and uniqueness of this project is that with multiple organizations participating and contributing resources, the overall and individual costs were significantly low. However, it became apparent as more organizations joined that representing each equally would be a challenge. Before canvassing, clear, direct messaging needs to be determined from each partner to ensure adequate use of conversation time.

To ensure the most effective use of canvassing time and the safety of the canvassers, volunteer support is vital to acquire as soon as possible. If more volunteers participated early on, the canvassing process would have been more efficient in the beginning, when there were only two canvassers. Additionally, partner participation in canvassing should be required to be part of this project, as this would provide an opportunity for partners to speak more in depth to residents about their programs, as well as provide context and insight into the experience of the canvassers.

Recommendations

A variety of techniques and methods were utilized in this project to determine if participation in city programs could be increased through intense, direct engagement, with an emphasis on door-to-door canvassing. Although this method of outreach is not new, as demonstrated in the EOW “Knock and Talks,” the range in topic of conversation, extent to which we conversed with residents, as well as the deliberate and determined manner by which we gathered information regarding residents’ individual needs for their home and community, is unprecedented.

Based on the unique opportunity provided to partners, as well as overall affordability and effectiveness, as demonstrated through resident participation and satisfaction, partners feel their individual goals, as well as the goals of the project, were met.

Project Future

In the spring of 2013 an AmeriCorps member was applied for through the Northwest Leadership Foundation. Unfortunately, due to federal sequestration, funding for the AmeriCorps program was cut and the position is no longer available. Partners are actively pursuing other funding means. Based on spatial analysis similar to that of this pilot, a neighborhood in Eastside Tacoma was chosen for the second year of this project.

Footnotes

¹ The largest manufacturer of food waste disposers, InSinkErator joined the project to conduct a yearlong case study to determine the impact garbage disposers have on reducing food waste entering our landfill.

² Derelict, foreclosed, vacant, apartments, businesses and those homes that indicated they were not interested were only visited one time.

³ Of the 534 conversations, 415 participated in one conversation and 119 participated in a follow-up conversation.

⁴ Of the 1390 conversations not conducted, 706 were because no member of the household answered, 489 indicated they were busy or not interested in speaking with us, 167 homes were derelict, foreclosed, vacant, apartments or businesses and 28 were due to a language barrier.

⁵ 87% of conversations lie between 1-10 minutes, with 50% of conversations between 1-5 minutes.

⁶ This includes 3 volunteers from the Pierce Conservation District.

⁷ This includes 322 volunteer hours from the Pierce Conservation District.

⁸ InSinkErator joined the WLPI to do a yearlong case study only.