

## MLK Intern Project – McCarver Elementary Charettes

Successful solutions may be grounded in empathy, understanding, and compassion for and from all stakeholders involved. Ultimately there is a desire within the City of Tacoma for informed, positive, citizen participation that is representative of all perspectives. Children possess useful and important knowledge that no one else in the community can provide (Chawla 2002). As opportunities for children to participate in the redevelopment of their communities increase, so too will the positive contributions of all stakeholders.

In an effort to continue and grow partnerships with the community, the City of Tacoma has reached out to the children of McCarver Elementary for their input on, and vision for, the future of the Martin Luther King Jr. Way area. The children of McCarver are quickly gaining a reputation as highly motivated and influential members of the community. This is highlighted through such efforts as the Zina Linnik Project, which raised 3.5 million dollars for a full renovation of McCarver Park, as well as a new playground and spray-ground at Wright Park.

We asked the students what they liked about their neighborhood and community and what they would do to improve the MLK/Hilltop Area. Responses ranged from daily ice-cream trucks to transportation improvements (including tele-porters!), so they could get to Wright Park and the homes of relatives. The majority of responses focused heavily on wanting to feel safe when playing.



The Outreach participatory activities included:

- Five separate scoping and data gathering activities with students, kindergarten through 4<sup>th</sup> grade, throughout May 2012.
- A visioning charette with 25 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders in the Peace Makers Club on May 25<sup>th</sup>, building 3-D models of potential redevelopment ideas for the former Browne's Star Grill catalyst site.
- A design activity on July 18<sup>th</sup>, which included a walking tour of the surrounding area.

- A visioning charettes on August 6<sup>th</sup> with 20 students, 2<sup>nd</sup> grade through junior high, where participants focused on ideal bike boulevard intersections. Multiple planners, members of the MLK Working Group, and community were present.
- An activity where the same students drew a particular feature that might help facilitate the creation of a bike boulevard. They were rewarded with ice cream for their work.

Children, like all people, are at risk of marginalization if they do not have a voice or a forum to communicate their stake in the built environment. They can be particularly vulnerable due to their lack of resources monetarily, their easily restricted autonomy, and the perception that their inclusion in the public realm is less justified. In order to engage children in the process you must engage those that children are directly accountable to. This primarily includes schools and parents. The charette, as a planning tool, is particularly suited to children as it allows for engaging and developmentally appropriate expressions of their interests and desires for the urban realm.

While these charettes were initiated for ideas rather than action, an implementation charette in the future could involve all of the stakeholders that usually play a role in plan approval, as well as children. Integrating a wide selection of participants can help broaden the issue and can increase efficiency. Young People want to be included in the work of adults but they want to be treated with respect (Gleeson and Sipe 2006).

