

TO: Alicia Finley, Recreation & Parks Manager & Ray Coffey, Community Services Director
FROM: Drew Pollak-Bruce, Associate Planner, SE Group
CC: Ellie Wachtel, Planner, SE Group
DATE: 2/15/19
RE: Focus Group Summary Notes

In January and February 2019, SE Group and the Winooski Community Services Department held a series of 5 focus groups with the following constituencies: Youth, Families, Young Adults, Seniors, and Nepalese/Bhutanese. Each focus group session was about an hour long and touched on a range of topics including current program use patterns, satisfaction, vision and ideas for the future, and the barriers to participation each group might face.

COMMON THEMES

Each focus group had a unique perspective to share, but a number of common themes were expressed across the focus group sessions:

1. **More programs and events that are multi-generational or have a broader appeal:** events could be targeted at youth and families during the day and transition to more adult offerings in the evenings, seniors could mentor and teach youth, etc., community meals, block parties, etc.
2. **Housing:** Almost every group identified the cost of housing and challenges with finding housing as an issue in the City. A housing fair or programs for landlords or tenants were proposed.
3. **Utilization of Obrien Center:** All groups—even the youth—recognized there is an opportunity to better utilize the Obrien Center.
4. **Food events and programing:** All groups referenced interest in food events and programing from community meals to food trucks to cooking classes for a variety of age groups. There was also significant interest in Community Meals hosted or sponsored by different cultural or ethnic groups in the City, but that bring EVERYONE together.
5. **Social events and programing:** Many groups referenced events and programs that focus on social aspects such as teen or youth dances, a 'Peoples Prom', block parties, pool parties, lock-ins or movie nights.
6. **Pet and Dog Programs:** Many groups referenced programs and events they could participate in with their pets, either an adoption event, a dog washing day, etc.
7. **Skating rink:** An outdoor skating rink was mentioned by almost all the groups—more as a community facility than in relation to programing, but there is also an opportunity to program this space.

FAMILIES

- New programs
 - Gymnastics
 - Cheerleading
 - Cooking for middle schoolers: home alone and feeding themselves more now, etc.
 - Community garden programs
 - Art from inside out
 - Youth and family field trips: farms, etc.
 - Woodworking
 - Music classes, rock band, etc.
- New events
 - Pool party
 - Teen night at the pool
 - Dances for kids
 - Peoples Prom
 - Traditional meals from various cultures represented in the community
 - Dances from around the world
 - Food Truck Night
 - Movie night at Obrien
 - Whole family events: something for everyone, early in the evening
 - Landry Park Family's Day: picnic and activities, bouncy house, 3 legged races, etc.
 - Student led community forums or 'community dialogue' programs: coordinate discussion based program with Parents and Youth for Change (PYC).
 - Dog washing day
 - Pet adoption events
 - Clean up day to make environment safer for animals

- Facilities
 - Ice skating rink
 - Teen center: education, other activities
 - Underutilization of Obrien Center: gathering there without much on offer
 - Dog park gets crowded: new dog park or 'wild dog trail'
- Communications and program info
 - Front Porch Forum
 - School District Newsletter
 - Email lists from events
 - Social media
 - During pick up and drop off at school
 - Coordinate with Parents and Youth for Change (PYC).
- Barriers and challenges
 - Cost is a barrier: scholarship program is important
 - Language and accessibility of info: posters with pictures!
 - Teachers and instructors: instructors with more diverse backgrounds
 - Severe lack of child care: 3 year waiting lists, etc.
- Bus Stop Program:
 - Need more stops
 - Should be year round
 - Elm street bus stop needs indoor space
- Pool
 - Learn to swim
 - Waterslides
 - Kids area/splash pad
 - Special needs pool events or programs
 - Night swims

YOUTH

- New Programs
 - Archery
 - Bowling team
 - Wrestling
 - Gym games
 - Drop in basketball like at YMCA (afterschool)
 - Rock band or DJ classes
 - Boot camps
 - Karate
 - Swim team
 - Learn to swim
- New Events
 - Gaming tournaments
 - Sledding events
 - “Lock in” event with movies, inflatables, etc.
 - Obstacle course or Ninja Warrior type events
 - Camping outside of the City: backpacking, etc.
- Facilities
 - Need to fix basketball courts: better courts like the ones at the school
 - Basketball gym at O’Brien center
 - Food at the O’Brien Center
 - Pool: Slides and water guns
- Communications and program info
 - Posters
 - School

- Barriers and challenges
 - Kids aren't interested in sports and programs

YOUNG ADULTS

- New Programs
 - Dog and owner programs
 - XC Ski/Snowshoe for beginners: provide equipment and training
 - Cooking class
 - Butchery
 - Intro to hiking and local trails
 - Aquaponics and gardening
 - Community gardening class
 - Brewing or distilling class
 - Financial education/support
 - Nature walks
 - Paint and sips
- New Events
 - Food trucks
 - Pet adoption events
 - Dog sitter matchups
 - Later version of Halloween event with music and booze
 - Winooski-specific Restaurant Week or drinking events
 - Campout party for adults: packing list, stuff to do, etc.
- Facilities
 - Outdoor skating rink
- Communications and program info
 - Unaware of most programs and events

- Seven Days
- Facebook
- Local businesses: flyers in bars downtown, etc.
- Often find out on the day of the event and it is too late
- Didn't know about tax prep, but would like to do it
- Barriers and challenges
 - No transportation between Church St. Downtown and Winooski: Night Bus Thurs-Sat
 - Winooski parking garage no convenient, expensive, etc.
 - If they show up to a program or event and if it's all kids and families they might leave; feel uncomfortable.
 - Feel as though they wouldn't make friends at programs
 - Circulator challenging to navigate during events, or all the time.
 - Events like Waking Windows are crowded, didn't go out as much
- Timing
 - Saturday and Sunday afternoons
 - Early AM events and programs on weekends don't work well; some they were interested in started too early
 - Before or after work programs
 - Weeknights are good for programs, 7-8PM starts
- Positive things about Winooski
 - Walkability and something going on
 - Not all college students: mix of people, ages, incomes, etc
 - Cheaper than Burlington

SENIORS

- New Programs
 - Library and Schools: volunteer reading programs to read to children
 - United Way Foster Grandparent Program to come and speak at senior center

- Easy bird watching walk: slow paced, picnic
- Programs with Downtown Winooski: Art Walks, trivia night, etc—promote to seniors
- Advertising of other programs (Essex, etc.)
- Cribbage on Sunday afternoon, could offer more games
- Gardening programs
- Senior Center Field Trips
 - Many cannot drive
 - Cost may preclude some folks: scholarships?
 - Farmers Market field trip
 - Shopping
 - Pine Street: Lake Champlain Chocolates, etc.
 - King Arthur Flour
 - Pre-Christmas lights and shopping
 - Garden tour
 - Art exhibits
 - Shelburne Museum
 - Lunch at Dutch Mill
 - Nature walks
- New Events
 - More new American Friday lunches
 - Food is delicious
 - Could it be rotational (different cultures each week, etc.)
 - Getting 30 people; most of them are seniors
 - Playing cards, Tai Chi, etc.
 - Bingo brings in 50 people a week, maybe try a different day—combining with other programs doesn't work very well. People just want to play bingo when they come.
- Facilities

- Community Garden Plots: AmeriCorps, lots of seniors use, great new things
- Senior center
 - Like the layout of the Essex Senior Center—more open and friendly. Feel like you are coming into their living room. (Essex 300 members; Winooski 50 members)
 - Arrive at Winooski Senior Center: “Who are you and what do you want?”
 - Could have better greeting and volunteers to help with that
 - Card tables: would greatly improve the operations of the senior center and facilitate many activities
 - Wider variety of programs
- Communications and program info
 - Many get info at senior center, but what if they aren’t going there yet?
 - Facebook
 - Website
 - Brochure
 - Senior Center Newsletter and Calendar (worked on, but not active now)
 - School District Newsletter includes senior center info
 - A lot of members are not Winooski residents: don’t get school district newsletter and other info
 - Front porch forum
 - Put menu for meals in communications: people are interested in what the meal will be
 - Bulletin boards at senior housing: have done in the past, but can improve and be more consistent
- Barriers and challenges
 - Costs a barrier for senior programs? Most are free now, but cost may preclude some folks
 - Fixed incomes
- Lunch Program
 - Age well food has improved, but lunch program isn’t working well now

- Used to have 30-40 people there; last time there was 9 people (4 staff and 5 volunteers)
- Meal program inconsistent: when it was weekly people always knew when it was, now it is the 2nd & 4th Tuesday and people get confused.
- Transportation to get the senior center can sometimes be an issue (Jim from Age Well will transport folks sometimes)
- Timing
 - Before dark!
 - More afternoon programs; everything is in the morning. A lot of things from 10AM-1PM. Result of part time staff
 - More early afternoon programs
- Overall goals/vision
 - Accessible to a wide group of people (scholarships, etc.)
 - Sense of community: senior center works at that; Obrien center not as much—limited staff
 - Winooski cannot be all things to all people—how to prioritize?

NEPALESE/BHUTANESE

- New Programs
 - Fitness programs, Zumba, etc
 - Community meals/food
 - English learning at the Obrien center
- New Events
 - Housing and apartment fair: event to connect landlords with community members
- Facilities
 - More meetings and utilization of Obrien center
- Communications and program info
 - Speak with them directly and invite them to get together
 - Religious leader is also social leader and soccer organizer. Will be a good community contact.

- Barriers and challenges
 - Language
 - Cultural differences: relationship with government and authority figures; need to communicate these are services FOR THEM. They need to know they can and should have access to city programming as residents and can be “in the drivers seat.”
 - Scared of meeting at City Hall: feel as though it is the police department
 - Costs: voucher programs, scholarships, etc.