



Focus Group Overview:

As part of the City of McMinnville's strategic planning process, focus groups were conducted February 22nd to 24th, 2023. Summaries of the major themes discussed by focus groups are contained on the following pages. The participants were recruited by City staff.

Focus Group Process:

A focus group is a small-group discussion guided by a trained facilitator. It is used to gather in-depth information about a community's thoughts and opinions on a specific topic. The interaction enables participants to ask questions of each other, as well as to re-evaluate and reconsider their own understandings of their specific experiences. The facilitator, who's role is to gather information in an impartial and confidential manner, manages the pace of the discussion, and ensures that everyone has a chance to participate. The group meets for a limited duration, and all participants are recruited by city staff. The process typically includes a set of questions and a follow-up discussion within the small group.

In the case of McMinnville's focus groups, the discussion topics were strengths and challenges for the city. The meetings ran for approximately 90 minutes and 27 people participated. At the conclusion of each focus group, each participant was asked to identify three areas for the city to focus efforts and resources on over the next five years. This structure requires participants to prioritize their thoughts in a succinct manner and may provide a summary of key strategic issues to be considered using the qualitative data from the rest of the report.

Focus Group Context within the Strategic Planning Process

The main purpose of focus group research is to draw upon respondents' attitudes, feelings, beliefs, experiences, and reactions in a way that complements other data collection methods, such as surveys or one-to-one interviews. These attitudes, feelings and beliefs may be partially independent of a group or its social setting. However, they are more likely to be revealed via the social gathering and the interaction which being in a focus group entails. Focus groups help to generate qualitative data that identify general themes of importance to the community.

Focus Group Questions/Areas of Exploration:

A broad set of questions were developed to guide the focus group discussions. The questions provided areas to explore rather than a strict outline to follow. Follow-up questions were asked during each session based upon the answers given to explore the answer or issue more deeply. The questions are listed below.

1. When you think of what you like best about the city, what comes to mind?
2. When you think about McMinnville as compared to other area communities, what comes to mind about the challenges of this community?
3. What are the advantages of living in McMinnville as compared to other places?
4. If you could change things about McMinnville what would they be?
5. When you think about all of the things the City does, what are the most important to you?
6. Of the important roles that the City plays in helping to create a good quality of life, what are the most important to maintaining or creating a high-quality future?
7. If you could choose three things for the City to focus efforts and resources on over the next five years, what would they be?

Summary of Major Themes:

Participants in the discussion emphasized various aspects of the community that are important for maintaining a high-quality life in the city. Here is a detailed breakdown of their thoughts and concerns within the following categories: public safety, roads, city services, business, community amenities, affordable housing, and infrastructure.

Public Safety:

The participants highlighted the crucial role of police and fire services in the city, emphasizing their importance in ensuring a safe environment for residents. They appreciated the presence of these services in the community and recognized their role in maintaining a high-quality life. As the city grows, participants believe it is essential to continue investing in public safety to keep the community secure and thriving.

One group noted that there have been needles found near the civic center, and that the skate park is not safe as well. Drug use was a concern mentioned by several groups, with one group noting that the number of drug addicted babies born at the hospital has increased over the last five year. However, public safety response times are regarded favorably, with both police and EMS on scene in minutes.

Traffic, especially at Bobby Ray Elementary School, is a concern since parents line up on Chancery and you can't get in or out of area businesses. While it happens at the high school as well, the elementary school is a bigger issue, because it is a multi-lane highway with one lane completely blocked.

Roads:

Road maintenance and improvement were deemed vital for the city's future. Participants expressed concerns over the current condition of some roads and sidewalks, suggesting that the city invest more in their upkeep. They also mentioned the importance of keeping roads clean and free of weeds to create a more visually appealing environment. Participants emphasized that well-maintained roads contribute to the city's overall image, and overall make it a more attractive place to live and work. Secondary roads were specifically mentioned as not being in good condition.

There are concerns about several intersections, including Main and High in front of First National. Traffic lights in front of First National on Main don't seem to work properly, as it has been the site of several recent accidents. The ability for trucks to turn, especially while pulling a trailer, was a concern on Main Street. While some participants discussed the City program to fix roads that are in poor condition, there was general consensus that there needs to be more work done as soon as possible.

Infrastructure:

Participants stressed the need for well-maintained infrastructure to support the city's growth and development. They mentioned the importance of walkability and emphasized the need for better sidewalks and pedestrian crossings. Residents who use strollers for children or need wheelchairs struggle to navigate through the community, and having sidewalks that are ADA compliant is an important factor for these residents.

Participants also raised concerns about the city's ability to grow due to state laws that limit annexation. They suggested that this restriction on growth could hamper the development of green spaces and other community amenities on the city's outskirts.

Water and sewer were mentioned by several people as needing improvement, with the sewer lines on Main Street described as "unusable". One group suggested considering internet as a part of infrastructure since fiber internet is an important component of economic growth.

City Services:

City services such as water, electric, and street lighting were praised by the participants. They appreciated the easy accessibility to utility officials, attributing this advantage to the city's small-town atmosphere. One business owner noted that he had considered buying a generator, and then decided he didn't need to because of how reliable electric is downtown. However, they also mentioned the need for improved connectivity between parks and other amenities, suggesting the development of walkways and bike paths to facilitate easier access to recreational areas.

The City of McMinnville does a great job with trash and brush pickup according to several participants. There is a noticeable difference between the city and the county. The Riverfront Park and Pepper Branch Park are both well taken care of. The library is also seen as a community strength, although more funding is needed according to some participants.

Some participants noted concerns about communication. There seems to be a disconnect between the City and County, and they are not collaborating as well as they should (although it was noted that communication is improved in recent years). One group discussed fragmentation between Main Street,

the Chamber, the city and tourism assets located in the county. This group also suggested a website update to further transparency and communication.

Economic Development/Downtown:

Participants recognized the importance of attracting new businesses and industries to the city to provide economic opportunities and create a more vibrant community. They noted the current lack of professional positions within city limits, leading many residents to commute to nearby cities for work. The participants also discussed the need for supporting existing businesses, particularly small, locally owned ones. They also encouraged the development of vacant land for commercial purposes. Participants suggested the city promote available tax incentives and programs to attract new businesses, and to help existing ones grow. One group also suggested that incentives be developed to create and support jobs for disabled residents in order to keep them active in the workforce.

Participants noted that attracting businesses can be a challenge because of the distance from the interstate. Most of the groups mentioned the need for additional restaurants, and for them to be open later, as well as on Mondays. The business focus group noted that it can be a challenge to get approval since it sometimes is needed at several levels (City council, County commissioners, etc.), and that if just one person opposes something it can significantly impact the odds of approval. Approval at times seems to be based upon individual taste of the approving officials. A comprehensive vision of what McMinnville will be needs to be developed and shared, with decisions made with that community outcome in mind.

Phase 3 of the downtown plan was discussed at length by two groups. There is frustration that it has not been implemented, as the plans are available. One group suggested getting back in touch with the consultants who did the plan, as they have experience in helping cities get the grants to pay for these types of projects.

Zoning in general was discussed by several groups as needing improvement, with a balance needed between making businesses good community partners, but not burdening them excessively with expenses. Among specific frustrations were challenges in getting signs approved, with participants noting it can take six weeks to approve a sign. One person noted they had to retain an attorney to get a sign approved. The standards for downtown can be inflexible and difficult to work around, and approval is needed for paint colors without a clear definition in the historic guidelines of what is or is not acceptable. Several groups noticed that code enforcement seems to be selectively applied, and they wanted more consistent enforcement.

Community Amenities:

Parks, recreation, education, and other community amenities were deemed essential for a high-quality life in the city. Participants discussed the importance of investing in these areas to ensure a healthy, active lifestyle for residents-- particularly children and young people. Sports and other recreational activities were mentioned as a way to keep youth engaged and out of trouble, with long-term benefits for the entire community. As land along the riverfront becomes available, one group discussed the need to buy it, as it could be used to further enhance opportunities for outdoor recreation. Participants also acknowledged the need for more dining options and other local businesses to enhance the city's overall appeal.

The groups discussed the need for activities for young people, which are described as teens through 30's. The Park Theater is seen as a community attribute that should be better utilized. Concerts in the summer are well attended family events, and more should be added to take advantage of the great fall weather. The front porch of the Chamber of Commerce was designed to be a stage and should be used that way. An indoor pool was also mentioned by several participants.

Affordable Housing:

Affordable housing was another concern raised by participants. They observed the availability of land for housing development but noted that many areas remain undeveloped or have dilapidated buildings. They suggested the city encourage the development of these lands for residential purposes to increase the availability of affordable housing and improve the city's overall image. They also mentioned the importance of McMinnville planning to accommodate growth and prevent problems associated with rapid expansion, such as those experienced by nearby cities.

Keeping young adults in McMinnville was discussed by several groups, and the price of housing is seen as a barrier to that. Rental units are hard to find, and many rental properties are not well maintained.

Mental illness and chronic drug use is contributing to an existing homelessness issue for the community. There are many transitional homeless in McMinnville with families including children living in cars. There are multiple barriers to housing for this group and creative solutions need to be implemented.

Schools:

Public and private schools also work well together to provide services to kids, share use of facilities and more according to one group. That spirit of cooperation is unusual and appreciated since the focus is what is best for the kids. However schooling options can be a challenge for kids who want to go to college, as the college prep options are not strong.

Conclusion:

In summary, participants in the discussion expressed the importance of various aspects of the community for maintaining a high-quality life in the city. They emphasized public safety, well-maintained roads, and city services as crucial factors. The need for attracting and supporting businesses, developing affordable housing, and investing in community amenities and infrastructure were also highlighted. Participants suggested improved communication and promotion of available programs and incentives as a way to foster growth.

Three priorities for McMinnville:

At the conclusion of the focus groups, participants were asked, "If you could choose three things for the Village to focus efforts and resources on over the next five years, what would they be?" After an hour of sharing ideas, perspectives, and suggestions about a variety of topics, this question encourages participants to narrow the number of priorities to just the three that they feel are most important. Responses are tallied into the following categories:

Public Safety (5)

- Safe spaces for kids
- Police are having to deal with mental health crises, hospitals not equipped to deal with dangerous individuals
- Domestic abuse

Community engagement

- More focus groups and other ways to express opinions
- Events for people to come together (3)
- Better connection of resources, especially mental health resources (2)
- Community calendar showing all organizations and events

Downtown/Economic Development

- Public washrooms downtown
- Easier process to open a business downtown
- More amenities for young adults (shopping, restaurants, breweries)
- Phase 3 (8)
- Recreate downtown as a destination
- Tear down old buildings
- More stores- tax dollars are leaving McMinnville
- More and better jobs (3)

Housing

- Incentivize old houses being rehabbed, perhaps through low interest loans, especially downtown
- Affordable and well maintained

Infrastructure (5)

- ADA compliant- sidewalks, parks equipment, etc. are more inclusive for residents of all ages and abilities (6)
- Walkability/sidewalks (12)
- Traffic patterns/road configuration
- Easement on Depot Bottoms property for potential greenway
- Less trash on roads

City Services

- Improved city services for recyclables
- Focus on parks and rec
- Indoor pool (3)
- More services available for special needs community
- Food and soil (Community gardens, etc.)
- Increased library funding (2)

- Zoning applied consistently
- Tourism (2)

Other

- Growing number of people who are not in US legally
- Additional green space outside of downtown (6)
- Vision/focus/identity for City of McMinnville (2)