

SANTA CLARA AND RIVER ROAD NEIGHBORHOODS

A SITUATION STATEMENT

A Report on Interviews of Santa Clara and River Road Neighborhoods
Focused On Relationships, Issues, Needs and Outcomes

Eugene, Or

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Introduction/History:

In October 2013 a request was made for Bob and Diane to facilitate listening interviews as a follow up from a recent report and conversations between SCRROL members and the City. The mission of SCRROL is to develop a community-wide, shared knowledge about challenges and opportunities in our growing and changing neighborhoods that can inform collaborative decisions in the future.

The results from this listening summary are intended to be informative of the current situation as perceived by individuals interviewed. The purpose is to provide information that will help gain a more in-depth understanding of both the issues and opportunities in order to partner, develop, plan, and map specific paths to improvement.

Listening Process:

Interviewers listened to 24 individuals who were recommended by a group of Santa Clara and River Road Neighborhood association members. The purpose of the criteria for interviewee selections was to hear from key people who have been involved with the SCRROL process as well as some residents and business owners with a diversity of opinions on neighborhood issues.

Interviews were confidential, forty five-sixty minutes in length, conducted in person by Bob and or Diane and joined by City staff on October 14, 2013

How the interviews were conducted:

Bob, Diane and City staff listened to the perspectives and insights of 24 individuals regarding neighborhood concerns, unmet needs and their perspective on solutions. Interviewees were encouraged to speak opening and honestly with the purpose of exploring the current relationship with the City and any concerns, unmet needs or suggestions for improving the current situation.

Some general questions were asked, if needed, to guide the discussion and clarify points that were being made. The discussion was also designed to begin moving beyond the current situation to ideas for how the situation might be improved.

In the introduction individuals were told that the report would be written in a way that would maintain the confidentiality of the discussions. Names of everyone who participated would not be provided in the report and notes from individual discussions would not be shared but they would be used to develop this summary assessment. People's words would be used but no one would be identified with a specific statement.

The Report:

The report documents, in general terms, issues and concerns that were identified and provides recommended next steps based on this information.

The feedback evaluation is not meant to be a comprehensive statement of fact; rather, it represents the personal knowledge, opinions and biases of the people with whom they spoke. The report is not designed to ascertain the accuracy behind individual statements, but rather to identify and document the perceptions held by the individuals. The wide range of opinion and perceptions that exist will be the

starting point for exploring how to best move ahead. Bob, Diane and City staff greatly appreciated the willingness of the people interviewed to openly share their thoughts, concerns and ideas.

By necessity, this report condenses, summarizes and perhaps simplifies a huge body of complicated and sometimes conflicting information, and may, in some peoples' view contain errors or omissions. Clearly, it cannot capture the passion and beliefs that were heard during the interviews. Overall, it does portray at least some of the complexity, scale, and depth of appreciation, hopes and concerns that were raised, and suggests some pathways that might lead to improved approaches to resolving some of the issues.

Relationship of The Interviews With The SCRROL Report And Recommendations:

Bob and Diane interviewed the 24 community members before reading the "SCRROL Report And Recommendations." What was heard in the interviews, and what is presented in this Situation Statement, is highly consistent with the SCRROL report. The following statement represents this consistency:

"The SCRROL report is highly representative of the people in the neighborhoods. The statements of the people in the neighborhoods are highly representative of the Report."

Such a consensual relationship between the people and their report is highly unusual. That is not to indicate that all would agree with the report, only that the recommendations in it will resonate highly with its communities. This bodes well for the success of the SCRRIPT project.

THE REPORT

Present relationships with the City:

As the City has worked more closely with neighborhood associations in development of the 2006 Transition Report and the follow-up SCRROL report, relationships and trust appear to have improved with those we listened to. An underlying fear remains that the City may revert back to minimizing the value of neighborhood voices about decisions that directly impact them (i.e. transportation).

For others there is a general to deep sense of distrust toward the city/politicians. Whatever decision is made regarding their neighborhoods that are a benefit can be changed at any time by new members of the Council. The fears are based on historical decisions or actions made by the City that have never been resolved (sewers). There is displeasure and concern with zoning decisions (development/infill) that has, or may destroy the unique character of their neighborhoods.

Representation:

The neighborhoods are now represented by people who live outside their neighborhoods. They want their own representative on, or at, the City Council. They want someone who is connected to their area, who understands the character and heritage of the neighborhoods and will represent support for stable and livable neighborhoods.

They feel the City essentially ignores them until they need money. And, they make decisions without the neighborhoods knowledge or input. In some cases people hold a belief that politicians are generally corrupt.

Neighborhood Character:

Many people who live in Santa Clara and River Road Neighborhoods describe themselves as being independent. They do not need or want external help. They believe that by annexing into the city they will be prisoner to the decisions made by people who do not understand or think like them.

One person described the regional area as four separate cities with each of the following representing a city: Springfield, Santa Clara/River Road, Eugene and the University. This person felt that because the University has money, power and influence, it controls the decisions made by the City of Eugene. Therefore, these decisions represent the interests of people from the University but not people like themselves.

The impact of sewers on the relationship:

The relationship with the City was often represented by the time they refer to as the "sewer wars." This was seen as a heavy handed attempt to force annexation. It resulted in people selling their homes, impacting the neighborhoods with loss of neighbors. It was a highly emotional event.

Because of that approach, residents felt they had to take a strong adversarial role against the City to protect their neighborhoods. A coalition was formed and fought the City at the state level and won. Trust significantly declined and continues to have an impact on any conversation about annexation or city relationships.

Changing attitudes: While most people experienced the sewer installations as being a negative time, they are now glad to be on the sewer system. Many acknowledged that the hurts of the past have faded away somewhat, that people are more positive about the city and annexation. But there are still people who carry grudges, who do not want to be “citified” but prefer to keep their present rural status.

Taxes:

The concerns about taxes are complex and many. The City is seen as having real budget issues and the push for annexing is a way for the City to use the neighborhoods as a bank to solve these budget problems. In addition they believe the City will use their taxes for others needs rather than theirs.

They do not want to pay taxes on decisions made in the past that they did not agree with, nor had a chance to vote on. Most people do not know what the actual change would be to their taxes but believe that it will be a substantial increase.

If annexed, some felt that taxes could be transitioned in gradually, over time. Another approach suggested would be to grandfather those already in the neighborhoods, leaving their taxes the same, then increasing taxes when the property is sold. Others wonder if the City can afford to annex these properties if there is some sort of transition time for tax increases.

The situation for a small number of property owners who shared their concerns was that the increase in property tax would be significant. If it weren't for these significant increases they would agree that annexing made sense. A related concern is the increase in taxes and how that will affect the marketability of their property.

The concept of de-annexation was proposed by one person, allowing the county to manage the entire area. However, local people in the county area rarely support increased levy's to cover the costs of services. So, there is a risk involved.

One solution to the misconceptions some have about the actual difference in taxes, City versus County, is to make a wide and thorough effort to educate residents on their individual and actual tax cost.

What do we get for annexation?

A common concern about the possible increase in taxes would be knowing when that would happen, and what and when any direct benefits would be realized.

The proposed voluntary annexation bill is a concern. They fear increased density will be allowed, impacting the adjoining residents, without hearing any of their concerns. It changes the relationships between neighbors, potentially changes the environment with increased density, sidewalks, etc.

Some simply don't see any value to the property owner. They currently have no unmet needs and have no desire to change their current situation. These people stated they rarely or never have conversations with those who think annexing makes sense, that it would help resolve some of the unmet needs they have.

Saving the character of the neighborhood through an area plan:

Maintaining the character of the neighborhood is "the" key concern for all who were interviewed. In several cases people shared stories about proposed or actual developments that did not fit the area but were allowed under the current zoning. While most people stated that they are not opposed to infill

they want some certainty from the City that the area will continue to have the unique feel and character they sought when deciding to live in Santa Clara and River Road area.

There is an unwillingness to voluntarily annex without the City's commitment to protect their neighborhood from development that would change the current feel and look of the area, through an area plan, (often referred to as "the refinement plan").

While the biggest concern is for undesirable infill/development, some express deep concern that agreeing to annex means that sidewalks would be mandatory and in some cases would destroy tree/shrubs that have been a significant part of an individual's property privacy, landscaping and heritage for many years.

A concern for protecting world class soils:

Both neighborhoods still have a rural, agricultural feeling to them. The residents want to retain that feeling.

Residents have an emotional connection and concern for their soils which are referred to as "world class soil," deep and rich. They want the neighborhoods and the City to benefit from the qualities of the soil. They want to know this soil richness will be protected and used for its highest purpose: agriculture.

Developing a grassroots food culture:

People in the neighborhoods are concerned about food safety. Many front lawn gardens have planted all over the neighborhoods.

Over the past 6-8 years, some River Road neighborhood residents have developed the beginning of what they call a "neighborhood grassroots food culture." They refer to it as "food culture ecology." There is a network of residents using their properties and their skills to build "a robust, localized food system." Attachment "A" provides a description of this activity.

Some expressed a particular concern for protecting the, Bruner Farm, with some kind of special designation that protects it for agricultural or park use.

Both neighborhoods are concerned about the impact of annexation on River Road Emerald Park:

The Park was developed and funded in 1955 by the residents. They established a park district, funded by a property tax levy. It is part of their heritage in the River Road neighborhood.

The policy of annexation by subdivision changes the makeup of the neighborhood, reducing the taxes available for the park. Continuing annexation in this manner endangers their park and its programs.

The City originally agreed to pay a stipend for support of the park for each annexed subdivision to replace the lost taxes to the neighborhood: After 10 years the city discontinued this agreement, resulting in a substantial reduction of support.

The River Run Park District must now pass a levy or they will lose programs to the neighborhoods. They have been negotiating with the city on providing them up to \$200,000 a year in support, with no success. They have a funding levy on the ballot in November which will fund them for 5 years. Negotiations have stalled until this is voted on.

Their proposed solution is to form a regional park entity that would include all the parks in the city with a separate board, with taxing authority, providing for fair distribution of funds to all.

They make a point on efficiency, in that their employees are not covered under PERS.

They feel the city will be blamed if the park loses programs.

Efficiency of city services:

A few interviewees expressed concern for the efficiency of City services. They feel there is an inefficient use of, and distribution of, resources. An example was the multiple responses from the different fire stations in the neighborhoods. And an inherent perception conflict about which fire department better serves them. The support by individuals for each department aligns with that individuals negative or positive relationship to the City.

They also felt there is a change in attitude about road maintenance. The policy used to be... "maintain and repair the roads immediately and the public will support you with taxes/levies." Now it is... "let the road deteriorate until the people will demand to pass a tax levy."

Safety issues:

There is insufficient law enforcement coverage from both City and county. The Sheriff has only a limited number of people to serve a large area. The city police will only respond if amount stolen is over \$750. And, they get there too late.

There are problems with homeless along the river because of a lack of law enforcement, both county and city. Sanitation and safety of homeless along the river has a negative impact on others. The neighborhoods have volunteers who clean up along the river.

River Road Safety:

Increasing the speed of cars on River road to 40 mph has created a safety problem for the neighborhoods. There are insufficient traffic signals and safe crossings. This inhibits interactions between neighbors. And, it engenders fear.

The narrow streets are dangerous for the bikers. A student was recently killed on a bike on a narrow street.

There is confusion over who has authority in the mixed County /City jurisdictions:

The mixture of County/City jurisdictions requires application of different approaches for people whether on county rolls or city: zoning, taxes, street maintenance, park permits, law enforcement, road maintenance, and etc. It is confusing and costly, often requiring dealing with adjoining neighbors in different ways.

Transportation:

Many residents stated that resolving proposals for the Beltway could help relieve their problem with River Road.

Some expressed a need for a bridge across the river. Some expressed a desire to connect the bike trails from Santa Clara to the City.

Engineering concerns with zoning:

Present zoning requires sidewalks and/or curbs in areas with roads that are narrow, with no sidewalks or curbs. The vegetation can grow to the edge of the road. People have planted trees and even small gardens in these areas. They have an emotional attachment to them.

There are questions and differences of opinions about the management of sumps and seeps. Do we protect the natural situation, or design an engineered solution? They feel the natural waterways have been covered over and want them to be returned to the surface, to be more natural.

Commercial development needed along river road:

Residents see River Road as a meeting place between the two neighborhoods. They want commercial developments built here, that are consistent with the neighborhoods rural and organic feel. They want grocery stores that meet both the high end needs and the low end needs. They want a place where neighbors can meet, greet, eat and enjoy; cafes, bar and grills, coffee shops, and stores.

SCRROL/SCRRIPT are a valuable and successful collaborative process between the two neighborhoods:

Groups were formed in 2002 to plan for possible annexation. The 2006 Transition Report identified all the issues and came up with some solutions. The recommendations formed the basis for the direction of the SCRROL.

Both neighborhoods participated in the SCRROL process. They have educated themselves and are focused now on taking specific action for their neighborhoods. They have formed the Santa Clara River Road Implementation Planning Team (SCRRIPT) to develop and implement these actions:

- They want to do a visioning of who they want to be.
- They want to develop a plan for their neighborhoods (refinement plan?)
- They want to develop their zoning to protect the neighborhoods.
- They want to educate their neighborhoods.
- They want to focus on solving their problems.
- The neighborhoods know what the issues are. They want to resolve them.

Diversity on committees, boards, etc:

They expressed the need for a way to make decisions that better represent the whole, so more can be involved in the conversation. They want to be equal partners with the city on doing this.

One person expressed the need for more conservative voices and participation. To get them involved, seek them out: churches, bars, etc. He expressed that the more conservative residents are concerned about the increase in Latino/low income people, and the impact on their neighborhoods.