

Prosper Portland: Lents Town Center Phase II



Bilingual Focus Group - Russian
Eastridge Covenant Church
November 29th, 2018

Overview

This meeting took place with 7 Russian-speaking participants. Alison Wicks, Prosper Portland, was present, with Allison Brown, JLA Public Involvement facilitating and Hanna Grishkevich, Community Engagement Liaison, assisting with facilitation and interpreting into English.

Overall, this group identified housing and commercial space as key priorities. While they didn't feel that the location of housing here would be suitable for their families, they recognized the need for affordable housing in this neighborhood, and the need to bring more diverse businesses that can serve the needs of the area residents. Parking was a consistent issue throughout the conversation.

Meeting Format

After welcome and introductions, Prosper Portland presented an overview of the neighborhood and Phase I of the Lents Town Center development. Alison Wicks then described the area to be developed in Phase II, and the feedback that Prosper Portland is hoping to incorporate into any future development contracts. Participants were asked what they imagine as a potential use on the site for commercial, community space, and housing to understand the community's needs and desires for Lents Town Center. The meeting was mostly unstructured and conversational, allowing participants to ask questions and share their thoughts and ideas. The group asked clarifying questions about the previous development in Phase I, the 'agenda' and goals of Prosper Portland for this property, how commercial spaces might be decided upon, how their feedback would be used in final decision-making and what kind of community space could feasibly go into this proposed development. A final question asking participants to rank their priority (between housing, community and commercial opportunities) was done in a round-robin, with each participant sharing their top choice.

Key discussion points

Housing

- The general feeling is that housing is too expensive (in this area and in the City of Portland).
- One participant noted that, while she qualifies for the Home Forward program, it is still not enough to afford many of the housing options in the area. She felt that she has been consistently priced out of the neighborhoods that she wants to live in, forcing her to move further away.
- Safety was a key issue around a housing development, particularly regarding the homeless population in the area, the proximity of the train, and vehicle traffic.
 - Some felt that they would not want to live in this area because of the large number of homeless people they often see here.

- They raised concerns about noise from the train bothering residents, and potential safety concerns.
- Some felt that 92nd Ave is a very busy street and living so close to it would not feel safe.
- Participants raised the issue of parking, and possible traffic congestion with the addition of new housing units. They felt that having parking close to a housing development would be important for residents, especially families.
- When the idea of multiple 'levels' of housing existing in the same development (affordable, workforce and market rate apartments), one participant felt that was a good way to help people feel connected to a community. Like the idea of a balanced community.
- This group felt that the Russian-speaking community tends to 'stick together,' and many families will move into the same building, creating a cultural enclave.
- Participants noted that one such building where many Russian-speaking families had moved in was the Cherry Blossom building, and they like the inclusion of a central plaza and green space. One participant noted that this is a similar design to housing complexes in the Ukraine (a C-shape with a shared courtyard) and feels familiar to many in this community.
- Participants generally felt that this housing development would be attractive for single people or couples but didn't think that it would be good for larger families. None of the participants voiced strong opinions about the option to purchase apartments, or on their preferred size of the apartments (although one did feel that studios are popular right now with other tenants).
- A few participants felt that they would personally prefer housing in a location that is quieter, with more space (including park space) and less traffic. "This feels too busy for the Russian community," was one comment.

Commercial Space

- Participants felt that banks are needed in the area (OnPoint Community Credit Union was mentioned as one possible bank, as well as Chase Bank).
- Some felt that a produce seller or grocer selling fresh fruits and vegetables would be a big benefit. While they noted that there are some larger stores in the area, they raised the point that Fred Meyer had closed their location in this neighborhood and that the Wal-Mart felt too expensive for food. Similar to the Growers Outlet, a year-round market on 162nd in Greshman.
- One participant said that more bars and entertainment options would be attractive for young people. This participant also felt that a cannabis dispensary, or a Go-Kart facility would both be attractive commercial options (but did note that his mother 'might not approve of those.')
- One participant felt that a barber shop or hair salon (that could cater to families) would be beneficial.
- Some thought that a preschool or childcare business would be useful, especially for potential residents of a housing development.
- One participant thought that many small businesses together would be good.
- Many noted that there aren't many dining options in the area, and that current options are limited (either by hours or menus). They thought that more diverse food options (including something like Thai food or sushi, or carryout options) would be attractive and useful for families in the area.
- A suggestion was raised to look at the kinds of businesses that had closed in the area to identify gaps in the neighborhood.

The group had concerns about parking and congestion with any commercial options.

Community Space

- One participant is a volunteer with the Lents Farmer's Market and felt that this was a valuable part of the community. She hoped that this market might be able to be extended year-round.
- The group generally agreed that a permanent home for the Farmer's Market would be good.
 - One participant noted that she would like to see a covered area for a market space. Covered area like Director Park in downtown Portland.
- Parking continued to be a key concern, and participants like the idea of a market space that could be converted the parking on non-Market days.

In a final 'round robin' vote on the most important aspects of the development (and where to focus investment), most participants voted for housing (particularly affordable housing) with 6 votes. 3 votes were cast for commercial space (some participants felt that housing and commercial space were important and voted twice). No votes were cast in favor of community space.