

Prosper Portland: Lents Town Center Phase II



Bilingual Focus Group - Spanish
Wattles Boys and Girls Club
November 10th, 2018

Overview

This meeting took place with 20 Spanish-speaking participants, and about 15 children. Alison Wicks, Prosper Portland, and Robert Gibson, Palindrome Communities, were present, with Allison Brown, JLA Public Involvement facilitating and Maria Elena Alvarado, Community Engagement Liaison, assisting with facilitation and interpreting into English.

Overall, this group felt strongly about investment in a commercial space and community space that would meet some of the culturally-specific needs of their community (providing Mexican food products and offering a family and community gathering space for parties). About half of the participants use the MAX and other forms of public transportation. When asked about prioritizing Latino businesses or employing local contractors, some had concerns that any work with a City agency would require licenses and immigration papers.

Meeting Format

After welcome and introductions, Prosper Portland presented an overview of the Lents Five-Year Action Plan, described the area to be developed in Phase II, and outlined the decision-making process and how the feedback will be used. 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.

Key discussion points

Housing

- While housing is important, many felt that rents are overall too high. Participants also noted that many of them do not qualify for affordable or subsidized housing, but don't make enough money to afford market-rate rents. They had a strong desire to see apartments that were in between. One participant said that they "don't qualify for anything," but there is still a feeling that they are struggling financially.
- Many also noted that it is difficult to access information on housing, and felt that by the time they found out about a housing opportunity, there was already a waitlist. Competition for housing and waitlists were also a major concern.
- Participants noted that they would want to see affordable 2 and 3 bedroom apartments, to accommodate larger families.
- A few participants felt that residents of the area should be prioritized for any housing opportunities, and these should be advertised directly in their communities.

- When asked about the possibility of purchasing an apartment, many felt that prices would be too high and not allow them to purchase. However, if prices were accessible, this might be something that they would consider. A few noted that they were tired of renting, and working with landlords who either refused to update existing units or consistently raised rents.

Commercial Space

- Many participants felt that greater emphasis should be placed on prioritizing commercial space that is valuable to their community (as opposed to investing in housing).
- Mexican grocery store
 - Participants acknowledged that there are several ‘big box’ stores nearby, but nothing that sells specialized Mexican products (except for one smaller store that had a limited number of products). Many felt that their nearest Mexican grocer was too far away, and they would like to see something with culturally-specific products in their neighborhood.

Community Space

- Party space (“*salon de fiestas*”)
 - Participants felt it was important to have a low-cost private gathering space for parties (specifically mentioning wedding, baptisms, *quiceañeras*, among others). They felt that something that could accommodate up to 150 people would be valuable to the Latino community.
- Park for children/indoor play space
 - Participants wanted a play area for children, especially in the winter months when outdoor play spaces are less accessible.
- Civic center
 - Some felt that they would like to see a space where children and adults could take classes and participate in activities. Many did not seem to currently use the Wattles Boys and Girls Club.
- Farmers Market
 - Many found the Lents Farmers Market to be a valuable addition to the community and noted that it is a great way for Latino farmers and vendors to sell their products, and that some vendors brought items specifically for Latino customers (for example, types of baked goods eaten on certain holidays and special occasions). They would like to see a home for the Farmers Market but noted that parking can be an issue.
 - One participant noted that they liked the Beaverton’s Farmers Market and would like to see a similar set-up in Lents.
 - Some wondered if the Farmers Market could become a year-round market, rather than a seasonal space? They had concerns of what would happen in a dedicated market space during the winter months.
- Free activities/spaces
 - One participant noted that she would like to see investment in gathering and recreational spaces that are free for residents.
 - Would like to see space for Latinos and other communities too, space that everyone can use.