

2015-16

Westgate Belvedere Homes CRA Community Input



As a part of the on-going efforts of the WCRA, the Master Plan is being updated to reflect current conditions and information along with reformatting the plan to be a more user friendly living document.

A community wide meeting was held to gathering input as well as interviews with staff and board members. This document summarizes the input and serves to establish a basis for an “Action List” that will drive the Master Plan work program. It also stands to serve as a statement of the WCRA and its work in the community.

The forum also provided an opportunity to highlight accomplishments:



MOBILE GREENMARKET EXPRESS



INFILL HOUSING PROGRAM



BABBLING BROOK

INPUT

A Community Meeting was held at Westgate Community Center on December 3, 2015 following a mass mailed invitation, community canvassing and calls to interested parties. In attendance were residents, many of whom have lived in the area for decades, business owners and staff from county agencies including PBC CCRT, PBSO, and Parks and Recreation that have staff that work with the community. Commissioner Burdick (District 2) also attended and took the opportunity to speak to the community.

Interviews were conducted with staff and WCRA Board members.

Surveys were also available for written comments.



CONSENSUS

There was clear consensus and support for the WCRA and its work. The staff and the board members also were on the same page as to the direction and value of their work.

The area's location overwhelmingly was identified as being ideal and unique in that it is one of the few areas not been fully developed in the urban area of the county. Safety, crime prevention and property upkeep were raised as the most pressing critical actions to address by the participants.

SILENCE

As important as what was said, is what wasn't said... no one talked about flooding. In fact, storm water and the paving of roads were not a topic of discussion. Conversations were also positive and non-confrontational.

RESIDENTS

Some of the more specific community comments:

Safety and Security:

Want:

- Increased PBSO Presence
- Proactive Code Enforcement
- Citizens Crime Watch
- Street Lighting
- Traffic Calming
- Remove Derelict Housing

Don't Want:

- Reduction of Lanes on Westgate
- More Opportunities to Walk
- Homeless loitering

Community Character:

Want:

- More public art
- More community events (Greenmarket Express)
- Babbling Brook maintenance
- More Public Parks
- Merchant Business Association
- Dining Options
- Decrease in Rentals/Rise in Home Ownership

Don't Want:

- Auto Related Uses
- Low Income Housing

Design/Aesthetics:

Want:

- Florida Vernacular architectural themes
- Re-Striping Roads
- Mixed Use Developments
- Bike Lanes around the community

Don't Want:

- On-Street Parking

STAFF & BOARD MEMBERS

Both acknowledged they are ready to see more “above” development and desire to increase the budget to be able to expand area programs and incentives for redevelopment. They echoed the Safety and Security Comments

Additionally they focused on the operational side of the WCRA and offered the following:

CRA STAFF would like to:

- Improve their synergy with PBC agencies they interact with on a regular basis;
- Better promotion of the area from awareness of past successes (Infrastructure/housing improvements) to the opportunities afforded within the area;
- Work towards improving physical appearance of area;
- Increase development (more office uses, perhaps less housing in some areas);
- Focus on increasing the TIF;
- Provide more leisure activities for residents;
- Improve monitoring and evaluation of efforts;
- Improve Residential areas (increase home ownership, Neighborhood Associations, Crime Watch)
- Educate Community in issues like physical form and design;
- Encourage Airport and Kennel Club to collaborate with WCRA as partners.

BOARD MEMBER thoughts were uniform. They all agreed on the following:

- CRA has had great success as far as improving infrastructure;
- The need for vertical development;
- More attention should be placed on Public needs (safety, crime, home ownership efforts);
- Encourage more development of businesses (particularly on Westgate Ave.);
- Establish stronger relationships with Airport Authority, PBC staff, as well as Kennel Club.

Additional BOARD MEMBER thoughts:

- Alternative funding sources should be identified so that the amount of work already achieved can continue;
- Residents should better understand that some personal investment is necessary to better the community;
- Marketing and the need to improve the image of Westgate outside the community;
- Westgate should be visually pleasing to the community and visitors.

CONCLUSION

The exercise showed the amount of support for the WCRA and its work to date. It documented the consensus among the parties involved about the direction and future of the WCRA. It also showed the interest in building the community. The comments about the Dennis Koehler Park and the Babbling Brook showed the interest from residents to “own” these areas and want to take responsibility for them and thus the community as a whole.

It is an exciting time for the WCRA and its work and we look forward to what we can accomplish together.