

COMPLEMENTARY ENGAGEMENT

Youth Forums

Youth have been identified as a priority audience for the myPG process in an effort to empower and retain them as active citizens. Their goals for the future are important given the fact that they are the future. Youth voice also infuses a level of innovation that is necessary for finding new solutions to essential sustainability issues.

Besides ensuring that myPG's main Envisioning tools, the workbooks and surveys, included youth voice, a pilot project was also run with the university where three small youth forums were conducted to draw feedback from youth, on their goals for the future as well as on their desired modes of engagement. Three youth groups from three different neighbourhoods were selected for these focused forums: post-majority youth in the South Fort George area, Youth aged 13 to 18, and Youth aged 7 to 12 in Highland.

Below is a highlight of the outcomes for these forums. Full student papers with detailed forum structure and analysis are available from the City by request. Please contact Mark Fercho: mfercho@city.pg.bc.ca

Post-majority Youth - South Fort George Area

In consideration of the mobility of the post majority group, the research project was divided into two phases. Phase one consisted of a street based information collection session used to inform the youth forum structure. Phase two was a youth forum. The primary goals of both phases was to gather information and perspectives of the target group and to encourage further community based engagement and activism by providing a sense of importance and sense of making a difference. The forum took place at a local, at risk youth center called YAP. The forum was held in conjunction with one of YAP's youth programs, known as Future Cents.

Summarized feedback

1. What do you like about your neighbourhood? What are some problems present in your neighbourhood?
 - School near house
 - Trees, open spaces
 - Programs for families (Hadih House), Future Cents, YAP
2. In the future, what changes would you like to see in your neighbourhood?
 - More community clean-up (Recycling)
 - Less poverty
 - More police activity
3. What changes need to happen to get from 'present problems' to 'future goals'?
 - More needle boxes
 - rehabilitation centres
 - better air quality
4. What can you do to help meet these "future goals"?
 - Protect green space
 - More community events
5. What steps or actions can we take to meet these goals?
 - Vote
 - Stand-up for what you believe in
 - Write letters to members of Parliament
6. Can you identify any conflicts between different communities in Prince George?

- Conflicts between parts of communities (Hart area conflicting with downtown, College Heights)
- Low cost recreation could increase gang recruitment and activity

Youth Aged 13 to 18 – College Heights

In this youth forum, different methods were used to incorporate the diverse student population. Ideas such as open discussion, structured-go-around, and mapping were all used. The youth forum was delivered at College Heights Secondary School in an after-school leadership class of grade 11 and 12 students, so the focus was narrowed down to 16-18 year olds.

Summarized feedback

Common themes emerged in asking students what they think of and want from Prince George.

- More activities - “There is nothing to do in Prince George”
- a perception of lack of economic opportunities for the future.
- dissatisfaction was felt with the current infrastructure of Prince George such as the transit system and downtown core
- a lack of sense of community both within neighbourhoods and within the city were brought up as well.

Students wanted to improve these as well as environmental aspects of the city, for future generations. Based on their answers, the students had a strong need to act which involved volunteering to improve situations as well as different forms of lobbying to get the municipality to affect change.

Youth Aged 7 to 12 - Highland

Three age appropriate activities were used as a means of gathering information about how children felt Prince George should look in the future. The children’s activities were: 1) the visual assessment of urban developments; 2) drawing things in their neighbourhoods that they felt passionately about, either positively or negatively; and 3) an opportunity to design their own community. The youth forum was delivered at the Highland Community Centre for a group of children aged 7-12 attending a YMCA after school care program.

Summarized feedback

Drawing and colouring was a very successful method in gaining information from the children. A number of distinct patterns emerged from the pictures the children drew. Playtime and recreational features were a common theme in the drawings of things the children liked and wanted. They also seemed to warm to things that were familiar such as their homes and schools.

The students also enjoyed the opportunity to design their own community, however it was difficult for them to look into the future and imagine what they would like to see. They tended to replicate what currently exists in Prince George with a focus on adding development to the riverfront.