



Voices from the Community

The visionPDX Input Report

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URBAN LIVABILITY: Neighborhood Livability



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In the future, Portland will provide greater equity across neighborhoods and better connections between neighborhoods.

Section Summary

In this section, Portlanders express their appreciation for the city's many unique neighborhoods and discuss the features that contribute to neighborhood livability. They also express their desire to see Portland's neighborhoods develop equitably and to direct resources towards blighted and underserved parts of the city. They imagine that in the future, all Portlanders will live within walking or biking distance of a thriving neighborhood hub.

Many people support the idea of revitalizing neighborhoods and increasing urban density, but they want to be consulted in decisions affecting the character, quality and future of their neighborhoods. Disagreements emerge in this section over the extent to which neighborhoods have "voice" and whether the voices being heard actually represent all the people living in the neighborhood.

Summary of Main Ideas

1. **Strong, vibrant neighborhoods help create a livable city.**
2. **A number of factors combine to create truly livable neighborhoods.**
3. **Redevelopment efforts should focus on improving livability in underserved neighborhoods.**
4. **Neighborhood revitalization should not result in gentrification.**

Summary of Tensions and Disagreements

- A. **How much voice do neighborhood residents have in decisions affecting their quality of life?**
- B. **How can Portland's neighborhoods grow and become more diverse while retaining their distinct characters?**

MAIN IDEAS

1. **Strong, vibrant neighborhoods help create a livable city.**
 - Throughout many sections of this report, vibrant neighborhoods emerge as one of the most important components of urban livability.
 - Neighborhoods create a strong sense of community and contribute to Portland's "small town feel."
 - Self-contained neighborhoods help reduce traffic by providing residents with the services they need close to home.
 - Livable neighborhoods provide people with the access they need to a wide array of amenities (see [Urban Livability: Access](#)).

- Portlanders highly value their neighborhoods and want the City to keep neighborhood livability as a top priority.

"[I value] the neighborhoods; that I can walk to the bank, the grocery store, etc... It makes Portland warm, neighborly, and convenient."

"[I value] the importance the city places on community and the holistic approach it takes to create beautiful neighborhoods. For me, it's not just one thing, like transportation, environment, or economy, but the link that exists between all these things."

"[In 2030] 50 % of the population commutes by bike, foot, or public transportation. Neighborhood shopping, health services, and social services allow people to avoid taking their car... and allow neighbors to run into each other while supporting local businesses."

Sample Strategies:

- Every neighborhood has its own website with links to local resources.
- Increase the resources available to neighborhoods to make and implement their own decisions, plans and projects.
- A few people suggest that livability could be improved by moving away from the "strip" concept of main streets and adopting more of a "village" concept of multi-block hubs centered around intersections.

2. A number of factors combine to create truly livable neighborhoods.

- According to community members, the most livable neighborhoods offer the following:

Access to Amenities:

- People want to be able to easily access a variety of basic goods and services within walking distance.
- People also value access to entertainment, including bars, independent movie theaters, music venues and galleries.
- Access to greenspace and parks is another trait that distinguishes more livable neighborhoods from less livable ones.

Distinct Character:

- Portlanders want to live in neighborhoods that do not all look or feel the same.
- Local, independent businesses help give neighborhoods their unique character. However, some people note that they do not want high-end boutiques to eclipse essential services.
- Historic housing and buildings also create a sense of uniqueness.

Compact Design:

- Livable neighborhoods are compact and have a well-defined neighborhood center or main street.
- They are easy to bike and walk around, allowing people to run errands on

foot and walk to coffee shops, stores and parks.

- They are designed for people as opposed to designed for cars.

Community Gathering Places:

- The most livable neighborhoods provide ample access to parks, community gardens, community centers and other places where neighbors can meet and get to know each other.
- They also provide access to a neighborhood library and at least one neighborhood school.

"[In 2030] every neighborhood has a community center, garden and more trees."

Affordability:

- Real estate (for rent or purchase) is affordable, so families with a variety of income levels can live in the same neighborhood.

"[I value] the importance the city places on community and the holistic approach it takes to create beautiful neighborhoods. For me, it's not just one thing, like transportation, environment, or economy, but the link that exists between all these things."

"This city has a proud history of involved neighborhoods—people who knew each other and helped one another. Social good will can be an immense draw for businesses and others to the city—not just gentrification or major shopping centers for the elite."

3. Redevelopment efforts should focus on improving livability in underserved neighborhoods.

- Many residents are frustrated by the city's focus on improving livability in what are perceived as high-income areas (such as the Pearl and South Waterfront).
- People would like urban renewal dollars spent on uplifting truly neglected parts of town, such as 82nd Avenue, much of East Portland and pockets of North and Inner Northeast Portland.
- Instead of creating one or two "high rent" districts, Portland should ensure that every community has access to the following livability features within a short distance:
 - High performing schools;
 - Libraries with expanded hours;
 - Stores, and in particular, grocery stores that offer fresh, healthy food at affordable prices;
 - Health care, including doctors offices, dental offices, county health services and more;
 - Community centers and public spaces;
 - Recreational opportunities, with more free opportunities; and
 - Free community, cultural and artistic events.

"[I would like to see] less emphasis on downtown development and more emphasis on neighborhood livability."

"[I would like to see] good planning and no areas that are depressed or ignored. Keeping the whole city vital and compact."

"Clearly establish a preference for promoting the development of villages within the city, with shopping, schools, medical care, libraries decentralized into small crossroads-based villages surrounded by vibrant neighborhoods."

Sample Strategies:

- a. Encourage the planning of trees in less developed neighborhoods. Beautiful, established trees increase a neighborhood's desirability and value.
- b. "Locate urban renewal districts where they will benefit the communities that need help the most (i.e. not the Pearl or South Waterfront)."

4. Neighborhood revitalization should not result in gentrification.

- A key component of neighborhood livability is the ability of a wide range of people to live in the neighborhood.
- Gentrification reduces neighborhood livability by making neighborhoods unaffordable to many of the individuals and families that have helped give the neighborhood its character.
- People do not want Portland to become a city in which only upper or upper middle class people can afford to live close-in or downtown.
- Respondents would like land use planning practices to combat gentrification where it has already occurred and prevent it where it hasn't.
- There are calls to revitalize under-served neighborhoods in such a way that their affordability and unique characters are maintained.

"Encourage and support home ownership. Gentrification, in the form of property sold to investors, prices out the very people who give neighborhoods their vitality. What's left are people who work so hard to be able to live there that they have little to give to their community."

"I am a homeowner who has reaped the benefits of gentrification in my neighborhood, but I don't think the added value of my property offsets the lack of diversity in my neighborhood."

"We also need to help the poorer neighborhoods realize the excitement and change that characterizes areas like the Pearl and the South waterfront. No. Don't turn all neighborhoods into high price havens for yuppies and rich retirees. Rather, help each neighborhood develop a sense of positive vision for the future and then invest in that future."

(Note: For more on gentrification, refer to the [Economy: Housing](#) section)

Sample Strategies:

- a. Redevelop run-down areas, but not to the point of allowing them to lose their funky/unique character.
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TENSIONS AND DISAGREEMENTS

A. **How much voice do neighborhood residents have in decisions affecting their quality of life?**

A debate in this section regards whether or not neighborhood residents feel that their voices are heard by elected officials and other decision-makers. Many people approve of neighborhood associations, believing they do a good job of communicating neighborhood concerns to the City. However, another sizeable group feels that neighborhood voice is often overlooked and not considered in decision-making, especially in terms of the character and quality of infill development.

Still others feel that neighborhood associations do not represent the views of all the people in the neighborhoods they serve. Of those that express this view, some would like to eliminate neighborhood associations while others would like to develop alternatives to neighborhood associations that can exist alongside the current neighborhood groups (to read more on the neighborhood system, refer to [Social Issues: Civic Engagement](#)).

B. **How can Portland's neighborhoods grow and become more diverse while retaining their distinct characters?**

There is a tension in this section around people's desires to create distinct, self-contained neighborhoods and their stated desires to ensure that all neighborhoods contain diversity of ethnicities, incomes and lifestyles.

Many Portlanders would like the diversity within each neighborhood to increase, so that all neighborhoods exhibit a mix of ages, incomes, backgrounds and lifestyles (vegan/vegetarian, "hippies," families, trendy professionals, gay/lesbian/bi/trans). They do not want to live in neighborhoods where "everybody looks the same" or where the low-income people or the cultural diversity has been eliminated.

At the same time they want neighborhoods that do not all have the "same look and feel." They want neighborhoods with unique characters that are different from each other. This creates a tension and raises some questions: if neighborhoods have very different characters, what is to prevent the "trendy young professionals" from preferring one neighborhood and the families another? Or the refugee and immigrant community from choosing one neighborhood while the "hipsters" gravitate to another? How can the desire for diversity and the desire for distinctiveness be reconciled to create neighborhoods that work for everyone?

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