



STAFF REPORT

City Council

Meeting Date:

8/30/2016

Staff Report Number:

16-155-CC

Presentation:

**Update on the Belle Haven Visioning Process and
Neighborhood Action Plan**

Recommendation

Staff recommends that the City Council receive the Belle Haven Neighborhood Action Plan update and provide feedback to staff as the final phase of the consultant-led work comes to a close.

Policy Issues

Supporting Belle Haven residents and businesses in improving the Belle Haven area has been a long-held goal of the City Council. The Belle Haven Visioning Process and subsequent Action Plan implementation over the last two years has continued the City's focus on that area, especially in light of the elimination of redevelopment funds by the State, the relocation of Facebook to the area and the need to engage area residents in the ConnectMenlo General Plan Update.

Background

In January 2013, the City of Menlo Park began a community visioning process for the Belle Haven neighborhood to respond to changes affecting the neighborhood. The City's redevelopment agency (RDA), a major tool providing capital improvements and subsidized services to the community, had recently been eliminated by the State and major land use changes including Facebook's relocation to the Willow Road East Campus as well as development of the Facebook West Campus and approval of the mixed-use Menlo Gateway Project were greatly affecting the area. Significant demographic changes within the neighborhood, due in part to the Great Recession of 2008, and subsequent recovery in the years following were also changing the look and feel of the area. Finally, the anticipation of the upcoming ConnectMenlo General Plan Update, which would have a major focus on the area, would require a well-connected community with capacity to participate in, and influence, that lengthy process, would be needed for success.

Leading the Visioning Process was the City of Menlo Park's Community Services staff along with consultants from MIG, Inc. (MIG), Peninsula Conflict Resolution Center (PCRC), and Alejandro Vilchez with AV Consulting. The visioning process built on the work initiated by the City and sought to engage a broader cross-section of the Belle Haven neighborhood than had been involved with earlier planning processes. It was designed to identify community values, prioritize services and programs, identify needed improvements, and build capacity to better position Belle Haven residents to work with the City of Menlo Park, community partners and other stakeholders to advocate for the neighborhood's interests.

The culmination of the Visioning Process led to the development of a Belle Haven Neighborhood Action Plan which highlighted seven focus areas including Public Safety, Traffic, Education, Economic Opportunity, City Services in Belle Haven, Neighborhood Infrastructure and Working with the City. The action plan called for a collaborative effort between City staff, neighborhood residents and community-based partners to organize activities and projects under these priority areas. The implementation of the action plan occurred

over three phases.

Phase I of the action plan was implemented between January and June 2014. During this phase, four of the seven priority areas from the 2013 Visioning Process were addressed: *Public Safety, City Services, Neighborhood Infrastructure, and Working with the City*. City officials, community partners, and a significant number of new and long term Belle Haven residents participated in 32 community meetings and events where detailed action steps were developed. Upon completion of Phase I, residents reported an increase of trust, pride and vibrancy within the Belle Haven neighborhood.

Phase II (July 2014 - June 2015) consisted of similar strategies as the first phase with a focus on strengthened communication, youth development, neighborhood safety and fostering resident capacity and initiative. New partners were introduced that included local merchants and youth service providers. At the end of the second phase a total of 29 community meetings and events had been convened. The second phase also saw the formation of a local youth soccer league, a coordinated effort by residents to promote ConnectMenlo and the General Plan update, the development of a Belle Haven community garden and the first ever Belle Haven Community Resource Fair.

Phase III (July 2015 - June 2016) was a transitional year for the process focused on strengthening communications, supporting ConnectMenlo through community outreach and engagement, continuing community conversations, and building resident capacity to ensure that long-term neighborhood goals are achieved. Although the Belle Haven Visioning Process and ConnectMenlo General Plan are separate and distinct projects, the efforts over the past few years contributed to the broad community participation we have seen at the ConnectMenlo meetings. Residents' focus on the City's General Plan and future development of the neighborhood and surrounding areas represented a major but complimentary shift to the work of the visioning process and neighborhood action plan.

Analysis

At the conclusion of Phase III (July 2015 – June 2016) neighborhood residents were surveyed to get their feedback on the Visioning Process work over the past 12 months and since the beginning of the work three years ago. A total of 86 residents responded (58 English / 28 Spanish), similar to previous years. Respondents were asked to agree or disagree regarding their experience over the last 12 months:

- 73% indicated they have been actively informed about meetings, events, activities, related to the Belle Haven neighborhood.
- 73% indicated they have taken more responsibility to find out what's happening in the Belle Haven neighborhood.
- 60% indicated they have gotten to know new people who live in the Belle Haven neighborhood.
- 61% indicated since the Visioning Process began in 2013, they felt the neighborhood is more engaged, active and vibrant.
- 65% indicated they have become more familiar with community resources and networks that exist in the neighborhood.
- 54% indicated they have shared neighborhood concerns with City representatives either formally or informally.
- 75% indicated they have seen or participated in efforts to address their neighborhood concerns, i.e. attended meetings, posted on Nextdoor, called a City department; spoke to a neighbor, etc.
- 57% of respondents indicated since the Visioning Process began in 2013, they felt more vested and connected to their community.

There were a number of other highlights during *Phase III* (July 2015 – June 2016) including:

Community engagement and support

- Meet and Greet with new Belle Haven School Principal, Todd Gaviglio (Fall)
- Belle Haven School Dialogue with Menlo Park Police Department (Winter)
- Coordination and support of Belle Haven Community Fair (Spring)
- Belle Haven Library Community Dialogue (Spring)
- Crime and Burglary Prevention Workshop (Spring)
- Published quarterly Belle Haven newsletter
- Regular communication through email blasts to resident database and Nextdoor
- Community Mobilization workshop with Public Safety Action Team (Spring)
- Outreach and support to city staff as needed

Pursuing partnerships with local businesses

- Tour and meeting with JobTrain and City representatives (Winter)
- Ongoing communication and meetings with Belle Haven Merchant Network

Connect Menlo

- Coordinate translation services for ConnectMenlo meetings
- Outreach and support to city staff as needed

Public Safety Action Team (PSAT)

- PSAT and Neighborhood Watch groups were combined
- PSAT addressed crime prevention and neighborhood safety issues including improved street lighting around homes and businesses, ballast rock pile removal, pedestrian safety improvements along Chilco and nearby schools

Overall, the Belle Haven Visioning Process achieved good results demonstrated through data collected in surveys for the past three years. Surveys measured the effectiveness of activities in addressing resident priority areas as well as measuring the levels of engagement, trust and vibrancy within the neighborhood. Further evidence demonstrates heightened participation and self-advocacy at community meetings. While community advocacy was strong before the Visioning Process, it came from a smaller group of resident voices which now has been expanded to reflect the diversity of the neighborhood. The improvement of neighborhood communication through Nextdoor, regular email blasts, neighborhood newsletter, and increased use of the internet by seniors and low income immigrant families has broadened the base of residents attending meetings and locally based community-building events. Providing bilingual access prepared new and long term residents for the current ConnectMenlo and General Plan process where knowledge and understanding of government processes is crucial. Other evidence of success can be seen in the following:

- The development of the Belle Haven Community Garden
- The formation and sustainability of the Belle Haven Mini-Grants Program
- Over 50 mini-grants made for curb appeal and community engagement projects
- Renewed communication and positive relationship with Belle Haven School
- Community use of the Belle Haven Neighborhood Services Center
- Annual coordination of the Belle Haven Community Resource Fair which saw 800 in attendance in 2016 (first Fair had attendance of 150)
- Increased participation with Nextdoor from 75 residents in 2013 to over 400 in 2016
- Monthly e-blasts to the Belle Haven neighborhood via email and Nextdoor

- Quarterly dissemination of the Belle Haven Newsletter
- The two year (2014-2016) formation of the Public Safety Action Team
- Improvement of neighborhood street lighting and signage
- Developed a neighborhood list of local contacts
- Supported the removal of ballast rock material on Chilco
- The Chilco Street pedestrian improvements
- Increased meeting facilitation and community mobilization skills
- The increased connection between residents and the San Mateo Credit Union through financial education workshops
- Increased communication between residents and Menlo Park Police officers and command staff
- Coordination of multiple community dialogues focusing on youth, library services, public safety, education and community change
- Community building events such the photo-voice project, pool-movie night, Halloween candy giveaway and the formation of the BH local merchant network

Despite the above achievements, the Visioning Process did not attain all its desired outcomes. While the Belle Haven neighborhood has increased its community vibrancy, inter-connectedness and information sharing, it still lacks key factors that have contributed to Belle Haven's perception of being an uninvolved, under-represented and detached community from the rest of Menlo Park. The following is a list of existing gaps within the Belle Haven community along with possible recommendations that will help alleviate the current conditions:

- Continue to increase the overall neighborhood connectedness with the broader City of Menlo Park community. Belle Haven residents are often unaware and uninformed of broader social events and happenings taking place west of Highway 101. Due to its lack of geographic proximity, Belle Haven residents often don't see banners and signs for events held in other parts of the city. Youth sport leagues and service clubs inadvertently contribute to this isolation. Recommendation: Require event/league organizers to outline outreach strategies when applying for permits to ensure information is intentionally marketed towards the Belle Haven neighborhood.
- Address neighborhood resident confidence with the local public school district. *Phase III* saw increased communication with Belle Haven Elementary School, however many residents express dissatisfaction with the quality of educational outputs. Recommendation: Convene a series of community conversations between Belle Haven residents and high-ranking officials from the Ravenswood and Menlo Park School Districts.
- Increase connectedness of Belle Haven small businesses and the Menlo Park Chamber of Commerce. During *Phase II* of the Visioning Process, staff convened 3 meetings with Belle Haven merchants to address parking, safety and other issues affecting business in and around the Willow/Hamilton Plaza. A common theme that arose was the lack of outreach by the Menlo Park Chamber of Commerce to include the area's small businesses. Recommendation: Encourage the Chamber to convene 2-4 meetings or events during the next year in Belle Haven to begin integration and inclusion of area businesses.
- Increase communication with local faith communities. The Belle Haven neighborhood houses approximately 10 congregational houses with African-American, Latino and Pacific Islander membership. While individual members of these congregations have attended different Menlo Park meetings, most of these congregational leaders do not have regular communication with city officials despite their memberships consisting of neighborhood-based and commuter congregants. Recommendation: Convene a quarterly meeting between Belle Haven faith leaders and city officials i.e. department heads, city manager/ council members to build trust and address issues that arise.
- Promote micro-lending and local entrepreneur incubation. As Silicon Valley is home to the world's leading technology companies, it is also becoming a trend setter in the areas of food, style, culture and

social responsibility. Belle Haven residents seek to lend their talents to these areas in similar fashion by way of small business start-ups, such as café's, boutiques and independent retail outlets. There are few business establishments in Belle Haven that are owned and operated by local residents.

Recommendation: Similar to the successful mini-grants program, develop a pool of seed financing that provides small amounts of money to Belle Haven based entrepreneurs coupled with tech and infrastructure education to support and sustain small business growth.

- Support the formation of a locally based non-profit dedicated to the Belle Haven area which will engage the community in a variety of activities to enhance quality of life in such things as affordable housing, community advocacy, citizenship and education. Recommendation: Work with local foundations and donors to provide seed money for initiative planning and implementation of a long term Community Development Corporation.

Genuine community change takes between 3-5 years and often the results do not become normalized until 5-7 years after the original initiative. It has taken over 36 months for Belle Haven stakeholders including city staff, community partners and residents to build the current vibrancy and engagement currently felt within Belle Haven. To ensure that the human and financial resources utilized during the Visioning Process were well stewarded, it is imperative that the City take further action that will ensure this momentum is sustained over a long term. A criticism from Belle Haven residents has been that past issues will resurface after an initial response has been taken and long term efforts dismissed due to lack of institutional change and political will. As the Belle Haven community continues to be transformed by external forces, the internal mood and will of neighborhood residents must be equally powerful to avoid the loss of the neighborhood's unique identity within the city landscape.

In the meantime, several changes in the City's ways of working with the neighborhood have been institutionalized and are expected to continue positively affecting the neighborhood, including ongoing funding for the Mini-grant program through the Belle Haven Community Development Fund; a new scholarship program supporting youth participation in recreation classes at Onetta Harris Community Center; the Neighborhood Service Center and ongoing Police Dialogues in the neighborhood; the quarterly Belle Haven newsletter; a city-funded youth restorative justice program at Beechwood School; the Council's new subcommittee to research solutions to Ravenswood City School District facility needs; City support for the Community Garden; acceptance of a major grant to implement the Big Lift at the Child Development Center; and ongoing negotiations with area developers to ensure that new development brings public benefit as defined by residents to the neighborhood.

In addition, Council can, at any time, revisit funding for additional activity through their annual goal setting and budget allocation process.

Impact on City Resources

The Council approved and allocated \$42,500 for FY 2016-17 for the Belle Haven Neighborhood Mini-Grant program and support of neighborhood communications.

Public Notice

Public Notification was achieved by posting the agenda, with the agenda items being listed, at least 72 hours prior to the meeting.

Report prepared by:
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