

# Latinx Focus Group

**Preliminary Summary**

*December 2021*

## Context

The City is currently fostering and strengthening relationships with Latinx Community leaders to create specialized engagement opportunities tailored to community needs identified in the City's Latinx Outreach study. These include conducting engagement in spaces where the Latinx community gathers, tailoring activities to issues of concern, and facilitating conversations fully in Spanish, instead of relying solely on simultaneous translation.

To increase access for members of the Petaluma community who prefer or only speak Spanish throughout the process, City staff have implemented the following four strategies:

- Live interpretation from English to Spanish or facilitation directly in Spanish during all GPAC meetings and presentations and public meetings, such as community workshops
- Building opportunities for Spanish language facilitation and creating spaces where activities, issues, activities are conducted in Spanish
- Working closely with community partners across Petaluma's Latinx and Spanish Speaking community to shape messaging and share outreach materials and events through preferred channels including WhatsApp
- Providing translated documentation and resources on the Plan Petaluma website (<https://es.planpetaluma.org/>)

These efforts are informed by and build upon Petaluma's Latinx Outreach research carried out by Martín Rivarola, Community Organizer and Public health specialist, and Ingrid Alverde, Director of Economic Development and Open Government.

## Preliminary Summary

This document summarizes the input provided during the pre-engagement in the Latinx Focus Group WhatsApp community and the live focus group held on December 6, 2021.

After recognizing the barriers that exist to engage Petaluma's LatinX residents in the General Plan Update process, the City embarked on developing a tailored engagement approach for the LatinX Focus Group WhatsApp community. This included two main strategies: building awareness of the General Plan through digital communication, and a LatinX Focus Group Session focused on the General Plan over Zoom. The process prior to the session involved educational outreach on the role of the General Plan in Spanish through WhatsApp. This was followed by a Spanish-language engagement session on the General Plan held on December 6, 2021. This session provided a space for participants to share understand the role of the General Plan and their participation in the process, share what they value about Petaluma, identify their priorities, and describe issues and opportunities across the city.

The following section highlights important themes generated from the input gathered throughout the pre-engagement and live session to inform the General Plan Visioning Process. It is important to note that the session was developed and facilitated by Native Spanish-speakers and the input was provided in Spanish. The themes and findings are translated here for reference in English. A Spanish -language version of this summary will be published in early 2022.

## **1. Importance of engaging the LatinX Community for the General Plan – Equitable Representation to inform Decisions that Matter**

- Members of the LatinX community are active contributors in many dimensions of life in Petaluma, as citizens and workers.
- Their perspectives are informed by their unique experiences that are not represented by decision-makers who are not closely affected by the pressures of living in the city such as the high cost of living.
- Participating allows the community to show its strength and express needs that might be ignored and brings community members into the process to generate solutions and feel included.

## **2. What LatinX Community Members Value and Wish to Maintain in the Future**

- Community Spaces, Resources, and Events
  - Yearly events that bring LatinX community and greater community together
  - Greenspaces provide valued access to nature and are well-maintained
  - Downtown provides a central meeting spot for all members of the community to enjoy
  - The public transit systems helps with basic mobility needs for those without cars, regardless of some deficiencies in service
- Welcoming, Trustworthy and Safe Community
  - The small town character helps community members feel safe and connected
  - People can be trusted and this promotes a sense of safety
- Regulations Help maintain Cohesiveness
  - Regulations on where and how people and business can be, post signs or maintain their homes helps create cohesive and visually pleasing neighborhoods
  - Residents appreciate the separation between different land uses, which helps preserve peaceful communities
- Quality and diversity of Educational Institutions
  - Schools provide quality educational opportunities for children and resources for families

## **3. Issues Uncovered**

- Dignified and Accessible Housing is Scarce
  - LatinX families are consistently struggling to find accessible housing options.

- It is hard to achieve the “American Dream” of home ownership even when two people are working.
- **Street Safety for Pedestrians and Bicyclists is a Major Issue**
  - There are not enough bike lanes or sidewalks, especially in areas outside of the city center.
  - Crossing the street is a risky endeavor, especially at night when visibility is low.
  - Lack of street lighting and crosswalks at intersections increase fears of accidents with cars.
  - Lack of bus shelters makes riding the bus less attractive and harsh, especially when it is raining or during heatwaves.
- **Communities who are Unsheltered are facing Harsh Conditions**
  - It is challenging to witness the struggles that people who are currently unhouse face daily.
  - The lack of services and housing for communities who are unhoused puts stress on our natural spaces.
  - More people who are unhouse are forced to make space in natural areas and on the sides of roads.
  - This generates feelings of insecurity for other members of the community who need to walk in these areas.
- **Some Families are Left in the Middle for Services**
  - Many families who make just above limits for government assistance do not have access to basic needs like childcare.
  - Childcare is a significant cost-burden for families that limits access to jobs and other opportunities.

#### **4. Priorities for Latinx Community Members**

The following are the top six topics:

- Housing
- Equity and Health
- Active Transportation
- Petaluma River
- Economic Development
- Resilience and Security

#### **5. Identifying Issues and Opportunities across the City**

- Green Spaces and Parks are Appreciated but can be improved

- Green Spaces in general are appreciated and generally well-maintained, but there is a strong desire to see them enhanced.
- Playground equipment throughout parks is run down and could be refurbished to provide better play experiences for children.
- Parks such as the green space at McDowell School provide important spaces for LatinX families to gather and celebrate, but could use more resources and amenities.
- Intersections and Major Avenues are hot spots for accidents, but the community can help identify areas for improvement
  - Crossing intersections in the city is particularly dangerous when there is not stop light or it lacks light for example Bodega Ave and Skillman Lane, where many community members feel unsafe.
  - All of Washington Ave is very challenging for pedestrians and it is difficult and dangerous to cross. The intersection of East Washington and Payran is particularly challenging, especially for children and youth.
  - Streets need to be improved with lighting, crosswalks, and other amenities to help people see pedestrians and cyclists.
  - A Participant proposed crowd-sourcing identification of challenging intersections through a City Text Message line, social media engagement or other dynamic communication.
- Street parking creates conflicts and limits public space
  - Many streets are full of cars since some houses or apartment buildings have sufficient parking spots.
  - People are still dependent on cars, so they need places to keep them overnight.
- Turn Parking into Housing
  - Large parking lots in front of shopping centers, such as K-Mart, can be turned into sites for housing and particularly affordable housing.

## 6. Additional Comments and Feedback from Participants

- Appreciation for the invitation and opportunity to learn about the General Plan, city planning, and zoning
- Recognition that they will never look at the city the same way now because they know more about how decisions are made
- Excited to share their experience in the focus group with friends and family to build more participation and representation for the General Plan
- Enjoyed the conversation and opportunity to share with others

## Learnings for Future LatinX Engagement

While the session was effective in attracting community members for their first engagement with City government, building understanding, and capturing diverse experiences, significant outreach efforts will be required to increase Petaluma’s Spanish-speaking community participation during upcoming planning phases. The City will continue to consider how to expand access and tailor engagement to engage with all community members regardless of age, racial and ethnic background. The larger purpose of these efforts is to ensure that the General Plan update considers the visions and needs of all community members throughout the process.

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## Annex

**Image 1. An example of Pre-Engagement Awareness Texts on General Plan Shared in Latinx Focus Group Meeting**

