ABOUT ALISON PETERS

Alison Peters started her research firm in 2002 with a commitment to partnering with public agencies and organizations needing public opinion research and integrated marketing communications strategies. As Principal Researcher, she has become well known across the state for her thoughtful and strategic recommendations in assisting a diverse client base.

Alison has worked extensively with local government agencies for almost 10 years. During that time, her clients have included King County, the City of Edmonds, the Port of Everett, the Port of Seattle, Sno-Isle Regional Libraries, Snohomish Fire & Rescue, Marysville School District and dozens of other local taxing jurisdictions in Western Washington. She is a trusted research partner for both focus groups and polling studies.
OVERVIEW

In November 2010, voters in Mountlake Terrace rejected Proposition 1, a $37.5 million dollar capital bond which would have funded a new Civic Campus for the city. The Civic Campus proposal included space for a new City Hall, new Community Center, green space, police station and expanded library. After the bond failure, Alison Peters Consulting was hired to complete a telephone survey of the community to better understand awareness of Proposition 1 and where residents want city leaders to go from here. Our key findings and recommendations were presented to the City in December. A spring retreat with City Council and staff was planned so the City could begin moving forward with some ideas and options for the community.

Focus groups were planned as a way for the City to drill down into some of the key findings from the survey project. One of the findings from the poll showed that men and women had different opinions on the Civic Campus project, so it was important for the focus groups to allow both men and women to offer their opinions in separate sessions. The City also wanted to learn more about residents’ impression of downtown revitalization and satisfaction with city services—both of which were not covered in the December poll.

With these objectives in mind, the City of Mountlake Terrace commissioned Alison Peters Consulting in June 2011 to conduct two focus groups of men and women to better understand how their attitudes and opinions on issues facing the City.

Alison Peters Consulting is a research-based consultancy offering a range of qualitative and quantitative tools for decision-making. Focus groups were proposed to the City as the most effective research option after completing a statistically significant poll in December 2010. The format allows open yet structured conversations and provides the time needed to introduce and debate complicated subject matter.

In this report, we have presented key findings and recommendations in the following areas:

• What’s Going on in Mountlake Terrace
• Awareness and Satisfaction with Local Projects
• Perceptions of the Civic Campus Proposal
• Communications

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The two-hour focus groups were conducted on two separate evenings, June 28th and June 29th, 2011. Eleven women and 11 men participated in the project. The sessions were held at Consumer Opinion Services’ focus group facility in Seattle, Washington. Participants were paid $75 dollars to attend.

The list of Mountlake Terrace residents was purchased from Labels & Lists (Bellevue, WA). Only one resident per household was invited to attend. City staff, elected officials, candidates and board or commission members were excluded from participating. Participants had to be 18 years of age or older.

To gather opinions that are reflective of the City’s overall household profile, participants represented a mix of age categories, income levels and education. Most participants were homeowners, but renters participated as well. We recruited both new residents to Mountlake Terrace as well as individuals who had lived in the community for over 20 years.

Alison Peters moderated the two focus groups. Participant handouts used in the sessions are included as an Appendix to this report.

WHAT’S GOING ON IN
Residents believe Mountlake Terrace offers residents a high quality of life, close to amenities, quality neighborhoods and a small-town feel.

- Positive attributes included a diversity of neighborhoods, a quality parks and library system, proximity to Lynnwood and Seattle, and good public schools. Parents of young children were quick to mention family-friendly activities, such as the Mountlake Terrace pool and Recreation Pavilion.

- If residents could have a say, they would not make major changes to the city. Their suggestions to improve Mountlake Terrace were mostly cosmetic; things that today do not impact their everyday life.

- As people thought about their city, some thought about the demographic profile of the city. Two things they wondered about were if Mountlake Terrace has become more affluent in recent years and its ethnic diversity.

Several of the participants in each focus group have lived in Mountlake Terrace for over 15 years. They can remember a smaller town, fewer apartments, less traffic, more small, local businesses (fewer regional employers).

- As the city has grown in population and new stores and services have been added, it’s clear to most people that city boundaries have become more confusing. People in both focus groups freely admitted not having a sense of exactly where Mountlake Terrace begins and ends. Many people said the cities that share its borders all seem to run into each other very quickly.

- One of the unintended consequences of regional growth is that residents aren’t as protective or loyal to “their” city because they can’t always tell on a daily basis if they are in “their city” or Shoreline, Burien or Lynnwood.

People do not think of the Premera/220th Street corridor as part of Mountlake Terrace. They associate this part of town with casinos and other industrial buildings.

- This is not a part of town most women said they drive to on a regular basis.

Mountlake Terrace residents are concerned about how local businesses are doing. They know a few unique restaurants and stores do well, but most, they say, are struggling to get by.

- People say they notice more empty storefronts and several people mentioned the departure of bigger chain stores, like Comp USA—a loss which then impacts the foot traffic of smaller stores in the same complex.

- In addition, residents said they’ve noticed a lot of turnover over the years specifically in the Downtown area. One man said, “Except for a few, it just seems like businesses can’t make it there.”

“It’s hard to call it ‘downtown.’ It’s more like a ‘main drag.’ It’s not a destination for me at all which is unfortunate.”

People refer to Mountlake Terrace’s “Downtown Core” as the shops and businesses along 56th Avenue east of I-5. This is an area almost everyone sees as in need of significant revitalization to improve business climate, safety, overall “look” and walkability.

- Looking forward, the women were interested in being able to stroll through shops and get out of their cars. They wanted this area to be a place they would spend time with their kids and families.
The men generally did not have this vision. Their vision for the area included new stores, such as a hardware store, drug store/pharmacy and fast food to provide convenience. There would be ample parking so that more people could come in and out quickly. Most of the men did not envision this area as a destination.

The groups reached consensus in their belief that new businesses should have something unique and interesting about them to drive customers in the door. Many people cited D & D Meats as an example of a well-known store with a strong reputation and unique product that is able to stay in business or perhaps even grow in spite of the economy. Cascade Gymnastics and the swim program at the Rec Center (“I know Lynnwood parents come here for swim lessons because our program is better even though they have a new pool.”) were also mentioned as stand-out programs. Residents want more stores and services like these in Mountlake Terrace. They have their favorites in other surrounding cities, so more of them “close to home” will keep more dollars right here in the community.

“There are just certain things I have to go to Lynnwood for. I’d rather stay here and keep my money here.”

There was considerable discussion about why a business would choose to locate in Mountlake Terrace.

- A potential roadblock to revitalization seemed to be confirming who currently owns property in the Downtown Core (i.e. Is it the City? Churches?).
- Residents said they want to see land owners more united toward a common vision for the area.
- Residents feel there is little evidence of a united vision and they criticized the City for missing an opportunity to develop the area decades ago when property was available and less expensive.
- Most of the discussion around new business was centered around small business services and retail. There was very little discussion around the effort the City makes to bring in private sector employers or why these jobs benefit the city or local residents.

More can be done to communicate the breadth of the city’s economic development plan to residents. Right now, when most people think of “new business” for the city, they exclude larger employers.

**AWARENESS OF CITY SERVICES**

“The only time I’d go to a Council meeting, would be if there’s a reason to go. Otherwise, no. Why?”

The City government is perceived as delivering a high level of services for its residents.

- Both groups rated the city high on a five-point scale (five as high, one as low) for the level of services it offers. The average rating from the 11 women was 4.0 and the average rating from the 11 men was 3.7.
- The women could name many services they were satisfied with, including police responsiveness, street sweeping, the swim program at the Rec Center and the library. One woman said more bus stops are important. A couple of women also mentioned they would like the city to reinstitute the curbside garbage/dump pick-up. The women then deliberated on their perception of the cut in service. (In reality, food waste containers were added and residents can put anything they want out on the curb four times a year by using yellow tickets given to all households). At this point, someone pointed out that they would rather have more regular street sweeping or library hours than garbage haul.
- Most people thought city services were being well maintained overall given a difficult budget environment. Hardly anyone thinks service levels are increasing; the only example mentioned was brought up by a woman who pointed to Sound Transit’s Freeway Station as something the City of Mountlake Terrace helped develop.
- Another important finding is that people don’t connect serving a growing population with “increasing services.” They see this as maintaining services because the new residents “pay for themselves” in sales and property taxes.
Six women and seven men mentioned the Civic Campus as one of the projects they associate with the City.

- Nine people out of the 22 mentioned public works initiatives as projects they associate with the city. Most people wrote down vague projects such as “sidewalks” or “street maintenance” but a few specifically wrote “Transit Corridor” even though this project was funded by Sound Transit, not the City.
- Only two people out of 22, or less than 10 percent, were unable to name a project they associated with the City. This shows a pretty high level of awareness of local projects.
- It is interesting to us that most of these people called the project “Town Center” or “City Center” project, not the “Civic Campus.” A couple of people said they didn’t feel connected to the name “Civic Campus.” We think this might be for a few different reasons—“Campus” might sound sprawling and costly which we know is a non-starter. Using the word “Town” sounds small-town and home-y which is how many people describe Mountlake Terrace. Finally, “City Center” is the location of this project in the minds of your community. It’s considered the center of town, today’s Main Street and where the “old City Hall” used to be.

Fifteen out of 22 participants could identify the City’s interim City Hall building on 219th Street. Seven people wrote “I don’t know” or “I know where it used to be.”

“Our city is clean, I mean compared to Bellevue and Kirkland. Police response is awesome. And if you call the city and you have a maintenance problem, they are out there.”

There was a lot of misinformation about who sponsors different community events in Mountlake Terrace, including the Easter Egg Hunt, Tour de Terrace and the 4th of July Fireworks.

- In both groups, the groups’ lack of accurate information about sponsorship led to questions and light criticism that the City should perhaps be doing more to support these events (i.e. “Why are private businesses now paying for the Easter Egg Hunt, taking initiative and rallying the city together when the City has always done it in the past? I wonder if the money isn’t there. Where’s the City in all of this?”)
- There was also mention of the City striping bike lanes in certain neighborhoods.

Mountlake Terrace employees were praised by almost all of the women in the focus group. The men’s group included some with positive experiences, but also some who were more skeptical of all government employees (leading to a negative attitude).

- Overall, women said city staff are responsive to residents’ concerns. Women described calling the city to ask about city code violations, potholes/street maintenance issues and safety concerns. In all of these situations, city staff exceeded the women’s expectations.
- Two men had specific experiences with the city and could give insights into their experience. In addition, both of these men had credibility with the group so their perspectives were valuable. Other men without direct experience with city staff let their opinions about city government on the whole dominate this small discussion.

The City is not perceived as overspending, but many people admit to not knowing a lot about how the city is doing financially.

- Despite a steady stream of information from the City about city finances and tax rates, almost no one offered up that they believe the City is in good financial shape or that their property taxes are comparatively low.
- Seven out of 10 of the women said they knew very little about where the city stands financially and they had no qualms admitting this piece of information in front of their peers. The men we met with seemed to operate mostly on the assumption that things are fine since they aren’t hearing anything to the contrary and haven’t noticed cuts yet.
With the women’s group, most said they would be surprised to hear the city is doing all right financially. Some immediately connected the city’s finances to being in the interim City Hall building (“If we were doing better, wouldn’t we have a new City Hall?”) while others pointed to the poor condition of Downtown as an example of the City not doing enough because resources “must not be good” enough. One woman said, “I just don’t see them pouring money into downtown.”

The men said they would not be surprised to hear the city is well-managed. Again, they haven’t noticed cuts to city services. As a group, they were in agreement that it was very important to make smart financial decisions (i.e. “If we’re in the black, let’s STAY in the black.”)

One person in the men’s group mentioned they were pleased with the thoughtful approach the City took in evaluating red-light cameras and eventually nixing the proposal. He felt that even though it might have helped bring in money for the city, he appreciated that the city studied the issue and realized the city didn’t have a problem.

City financial data is presented frequently in City Happenings, so either residents are skimming the content in these articles, not retaining it or not reading the newsletter as often as they claim to.

The City Council and administrators were not perceived to be a squabbling bunch, divisive or unproductive. Other cities in the area are working hard toward improving their image with residents, but Mountlake Terrace does not need to make this a priority right now. Overall, things are moving in the right direction.

Participants did admit they should have more information about what’s going on in the city. When asked about previous administrations and planning efforts, most people did not know enough to say what had or had not been done to maintain city facilities. It would take a long time to educate your residents about this history, most people aren’t that interested and it also looks like sour grapes. Better to focus on the current problem and a solution for solving it.

Residents like the opportunity to vote on ballot measure proposals, including those involving the Civic Campus. They don’t think about why initiatives are or are not a good thing for the city, but they know they like their opinion to be heard.

Participants, especially the men, do not know and do not immediately assume city facilities need a lot of repair. In fact, most of the men and a lot of the women think most city buildings are relatively new. They ticked off several “newer” buildings out loud, including the police station and fire station.

It is clear most people do not understand what our public safety officers would do with expanded workspace. They think of their police and firefighters in terms of crime prevention, officers walking the streets, cars on the roads, drug busts, tickets issued and a friendly community event. No one mentions “police work” (i.e. gathering evidence, storing files, interrogation rooms) or what firefighters do when they are in their station either training or filling out paperwork after a call. These activities are numerous, time consuming and require an adequate space commensurate with the city’s growing population.

The reason city offices are located in interim space does not inspire pride in the citizens. Furthermore, many people expressed growing frustration when describing the story of the former City Hall falling down and the lack of progress in rebuilding the building.

Renting space today is inconvenient. First of all, the location is “out of sight, out of mind” for most people. The location on 219th Street, while close to I-5, is far enough away from the Downtown Core, the Recreation Pavilion and the library that residents are feeling more and more disconnected to city functions as a result.

Second, people perceive renting to be a bit embarrassing. People explained that renting doesn’t help the city invest its dollars and it sends the wrong message to ask potential employers to be here when City Hall is in rented space.
PRIORITIES OF THE COMMUNITY

“The Civic Campus would draw people. It would make it more inviting. I kind of think, without the City Campus, there’s nothing too charming about that area in Mountlake Terrace.”

Participants knew the story of how City Hall came to be located at its current location. Most residents from both groups know the current location of the interim City Hall building. The current location is considered functional and convenient to the freeway access, but poor in terms of visibility and fostering a sense of local pride.

Residents were slow to mention which public buildings in Mountlake Terrace were in greatest need of repair. In fact, many people simply could not answer the question or mentioned privately-owned buildings by default.

- The building that was mentioned the most often and with the most specificity was the Rec Pavilion (one specific need is for Family Bathrooms).
- Even after hearing some people describe the buildings that should be repaired or replaced, the overall feeling (especially in the men’s group) was that most city buildings are in decent to very good condition. So, in general, we learned that this issue of building maintenance is not a top priority or concern.

Awareness about the Civic Campus project is pretty high, but understanding and accurate knowledge of the project details is quite low.

- When asked to describe what they think of when they hear the words “Civic Campus Project,” half of the participants (11/22) listed the buildings by name that would occupy the grounds, described the project’s vision (i.e. “A place where we can display our civic pride.”) or simply wrote “Developing the land next to the library.” Nine people wrote about “higher taxes,” “money” or called the project “a boondoggle.”

Most people think the idea for the Civic Campus began in the last 10 years. A couple of people know that the idea is much older (dating back to the early 1980’s), but most people were very surprised to hear this information.

- Very few people knew which buildings would be renovated and which buildings would be built from the ground up.

As a result of this proposal going back and forth over the years and taking various turns, it’s likely that residents have a lot of incorrect information.

- For example, it was common to recall that voters had voted on the project recently, but there was confusion about how many times the proposal had been on the ballot and for how much.
- A few people thought the November 2010 proposal would cost taxpayers $50 million, rather than $37.5 million. One person thought a scaled-down campus was a viable alternative with a price tag of $9 million. Neither of these numbers (the $50 million dollar and $9 million dollar) are correct.

The men and women had different questions and concerns about the Civic Campus that were discussed amongst the participants.

- The women’s questions were about purpose and usage so they could understand how they could use the space themselves and how their children might use it. They asked about the grassy, open space and about a play structure. They asked about the library and whether it would be expanded. They immediately put themselves in the images they were looking at. Women mentioned the potential for income generation, but this opportunity was not identified as a driving benefit of the project. Overall, the women’s approach was fairly big picture and conceptual. They liked what they saw, they trust the City to get it done and they think the Civic Campus will improve quality of life for the entire community.
- The men did not immediately think of themselves as visiting the Civic Campus or using the facilities there. They could see uses for other people. The grassy, open space was not mentioned by anyone in the men’s group. The men also want the Civic
Campus to generate income for the city, or at the very least, be self-funding after construction. Their approach to evaluating the proposal was technical and they wanted to get into the details. They said they would evaluate the proposal using a “cost/benefit analysis” approach.

Residents thought the current schematic drawings of the Civic Campus project didn’t provide helpful information.

- There were many questions about which buildings would be built new, which buildings would be renovated and if new parking is included.
- Some of the labels on the buildings were confusing, i.e. “Reuse” for the Police Station (“How are we reusing it?”). Finally, it is not clear if the Observation Tower has offices on the lower floors or what those floors would be used for. The men’s group spent time thinking through how to use the Observation Tower for private events such as weddings, meetings and parties.

Once an accurate proposal, including size, scope and cost, was presented to the groups, the women became supportive of the package very quickly. There was interest, excitement and very little push-back on the overall cost or the monthly cost to homeowners. The men were initially opposed to the Civic Campus and took much longer to become supportive. They wanted to debate the proposal for a longer period of time as a group.

- Some of the selling points for both groups were using energy-efficient materials, green building design and using recycled water from the rooftop garden. The women laughed when asked about sustainability and quipped, “Well, considering that our old City Hall fell down, I’d say sustainability is pretty important.”

- Another significant selling point was that the current price tag for the Civic Campus has been reduced from $37.5 million by at least $10-$14 million dollars. Awareness of this detail was very low, but revealing it had a big impact on this cost conscious group.

- The men’s group brought up the point that the city could be potentially paying less today than five years from now for labor and materials. This was an important consideration, especially for some of the more senior men (“Basically, I subscribe to the idea that if you can get the best rate, that’s when you should do it.”)

Staying in the interim City Hall building long-term was unappealing to most everyone when compared to the Civic Campus concept.

- When we asked residents to explain what they didn’t like about the idea of renting interim space long-term, they said things like: the current interim location is inconvenient and “doesn’t seem like it’s in Mountlake Terrace”, renting doesn’t make financial sense (mentioned by both men and women) and renting doesn’t promote civic pride. These arguments came quickly and were believable.

- Early on, without information about the cost or taxing mechanism mentioned, almost everyone in both groups said their priority was to move forward with the Civic Campus rather than stay in interim space long-term. We believe it may be easier to communicate the many reasons not to stay in the interim space compared to the challenges residents describe in supporting a new tax.

- After information about cost and taxing mechanism was mentioned, all of the women and most of the men still preferred the Civic Campus proposal over renting.

Some of the men challenged the two options presented in the focus group (a $22-$25 million Civic Campus and staying in rented space). They wanted a third, lower priced option featuring only City Hall space.

- Those in favor of the “Third Option” said fiscal discipline and lower taxes were more important to them than a larger campus proposal.
- Those favoring an expanded Civic Campus felt $12 to $13 a month was an acceptable price given the proposed amenities.

One of the questions that came up during this discussion was why a tax increase was necessary to build the Civic Campus.

- People asked, “If the City is doing so well, why don’t we have the Civic Campus?” This is an important point; it shows the importance of educating residents on what city revenues pay for and how city facilities have been funded in the past. In addition to low awareness of city finances, there is also very low awareness of how the city budget works and how financing of capital projects is accomplished.
“I remember reading about the community meetings in City Happenings and thinking they sounded cool but then I never did anything with that and never went. If it's not on my calendar, I don't go. I think the meetings would have been interesting.”

City Happenings is a valuable resource for information about events and news. Awareness of the newsletter is almost universal, and regular readership seems high.

• With some people (mainly older women and long time residents of the City), it's their only source of information about city news.
• Some of the men characterized City Happenings as “city propaganda” but this was by far the minority viewpoint.
• Residents remember reading about community meetings and descriptions of plans to revitalize downtown in City Happenings. The newsletter is still an important way to connect with residents on an ongoing basis.

Residents also learn about community issues by attending community events, such as the Tour de Terrace, by word-of-mouth and in written utility bill inserts. MLTnews.com was mentioned by name in both groups, but only by one or two people in each session. One woman is a member of a Citizen's Police Academy and she was one of the most informed members of the women's group.

• It is noteworthy that some of the oldest participants who had lived in Mountlake Terrace the longest were starting to pay less attention to civic issues, including city services. In short, their level of interest and engagement starts to wane after age 65. Our research has observed this in other polling and focus groups. It stems from older residents' changing priorities as they age, some physical limitations and, in part, these residents realizing they may not personally benefit from future capital projects 10 or 20 years in the future. Since so many more seniors are now living healthy lives into their 80's, the challenge for local governments is how to communicate effectively and also provide opportunities to engage with seniors as they age.

A few younger people in each focus group (three or four) use social media and the web frequently, and would probably be interested in local news and information. The rest of the residents said they were not on Facebook, other social media sites, nor do they spend much time on the internet for work or fun.

• Four of the 11 women said they use MLTnews.com as a source of information. These same four women also use Facebook regularly. Two of the older men had heard of MLTnews.com but they were not regular readers.
• The younger people who are “wired” did tend to be interested in the issues being discussed at the focus group, interested in learning more and they currently know quite a bit about local happenings. If they aren’t super engaged with the City now, it’s probably because they are busy people not because of lack of interest. Rather, we could tell they are people who seem to like people, like discussing ideas and like their community. It would make sense to find more ways to communicate with this growing audience.

Many people left the focus groups enthusiastic about the City Campus project and expressed interest in talking to their friends and neighbors about it.

• Residents acknowledged how little involvement they have had over the years in getting the project going and supporting it. We are certain more residents would feel the same way if it was pointed out to them.
• Many fans of the Civic Campus said they want to be more involved and would agree to learn more and perhaps volunteer their time. It’s obvious residents are busy with work, families and retirement. Many people would get engaged more if they were asked personally by other volunteers or City staff.
RECOMMENDATIONS

BUILDING COMMUNITY

1. Residents of Mountlake Terrace appreciate their city’s high level of services, its people, its small-town feel and the convenience to many area attractions. [As an aside, we observed a lot of waiting room chatter both before the focus groups and afterwards. It demonstrates your city’s friendly nature and perhaps their interest in more connection with each other that they were trying to reach out to each other.] It’s impressive that residents are as satisfied as they are given the significant challenges facing the city in terms of recent growth, geography (no walkable downtown and a major interstate bisecting the city) and its interim City Hall location. All of these challenges have made living in Mountlake Terrace slightly less personable. So, the task for the city is to strengthen bonds between neighborhoods, between residents and between the community and the city. Those bonds need to build over time regardless of whether the city stays in the current space or builds a Civic Campus. The lack of positive and integrated communications was one of the reasons Proposition 1 failed last November: no active citizens committee, not enough fundraising to support a Yes campaign and, as a result, not enough support from the larger community. In the future, the city may need to find a volunteer to work with the city in each neighborhood since there aren’t formal neighborhood associations. Right now, the city’s website has very little information about “the personality” of the different neighborhoods and what’s going on (beyond where the parks are located). Moving forward, you should continue recognizing and celebrating the local neighborhoods, especially through programs such as the Evergreen Award Program.

2. Downtown revitalization is a priority to residents—probably a higher priority than the Civic Campus right now because they see the area as having the potential to be revenue generating—but people are worried that businesses in that area have a poor track record of success. The city will have to take thoughtful steps and involve some of the city’s most successful businesses there to give the project a good chance of success. A united front is critical. When a key milestone is hit, the city needs to make a big deal about it. People want to have a vibrant downtown and they have lots of ideas. They just don’t know how to put those ideas into action.

3. Residents don’t have a lot of complaints about city services, but like most people, they like to give their opinion. There should be ongoing opportunities to submit comments online, by phone (perhaps as an outgoing voicemail greeting on a rotating basis) in written format or in person. The city shouldn’t expect to receive a lot of suggestions but will reap the benefit of the city’s continued promotion of an open-door policy. Residents should also be called once a year on their cell or landline with a quick and enticing invitation to visit the city’s website (“We have important news to share with you…” and to opt in for future information like City Happenings). The goal with this kind of outreach is to drive more traffic online, share important information and sign residents up to receive regular online emails or news alerts (which saves money on postage).

4. The City should continue publishing overviews and detailed information about city finances. Press releases, news releases to the weekly newspaper (including Op Eds) and articles in City Happenings are important. One of the key questions that needs to be answered is why funding for the Civic Campus has to come from a tax increase when the city is on solid financial footing. An ongoing focus on finances is important because our research throughout Washington State shows a strong correlation between awareness of a city’s financial health and attitudes about its future.

5. The City needs to supplement traditional communications with an eye-catching and meaningful online program which includes Facebook and Twitter. For example, the City Manager’s State of the City address should be broadcast online every year, not just published in a news release or delivered once to a community organization. In the coming years, more and more residents will be using online tools. Furthermore, after an upfront investment in staff time to set up these systems, the city should start to see a ROI as the programs become more turn-key and citizen engagement grows.

6. By the end of the year, the City Council may decide to place another ballot measure before the voters. Between now and then, the city can try to answer questions about the project and encourage suggestions. However,
one challenge is that residents are stumbling over the name “Civic Campus” and many people’s instinct is to call the project something else (i.e. Town Center, City Hall, Center Project and other variations). The interim City Hall location adds to the confusion. To raise awareness about the Civic Campus, a humorous YouTube video might be to poke fun at this bit of a challenge. You could feature various residents trying to remember the name or answer a question about the project and then have staff repeat “Civic Campus” several times at the end as a way to drive the message through and increase awareness.

7. At some point, the current schematic drawings of the Civic Campus need to be revised to incorporate some of the focus group observations.
8. Most residents don’t like City Hall and city staff being housed in rented space—especially when they hear there isn’t a revenue stream to fund rent payments. The more they hear about the renting situation, the more attractive other options become. It is a priority of the community to find an alternative to the interim City Hall but awareness of the complete picture needs to increase.
DISCUSSION GUIDE

I. STANDARD INTRODUCTION

A. Standard moderator introduction and ground rules.

B. Self-introductions (first name, family, kids, job, hobbies)

II. WHAT’S GOING ON IN MOUNTLAKE TERRACE

A. We’re going to start by talking about what it’s like to live in Mountlake Terrace.

1. What do you think of living here?
2. How has the City changed in the last 5-15 years?
3. What are the best things about living in Mountlake Terrace?
   a) Parks, library, low crime, jobs, transportation options, proximity to Seattle, recreation pavilion, walkability, schools, tax rates
   b) How do you make that determination?
   c) What do you think about what you pay in local taxes? (low/high)
4. Would you change anything about Mountlake Terrace?
5. How are local businesses doing right now? Prospering? Struggling? What types of businesses are doing the best and thriving?
6. What do you consider Mountlake Terrace’s “downtown?”
   a) Central 56th Ave. area, 220th strip/Premera or other area?
   b) What is “Main Street”/Central 56th Ave. area like for you?
   c) What businesses would you like to see on Main Street?
   d) What words would you use to describe the 220th Street corridor?

B. What are your sources of news for what’s happening in Mountlake Terrace (i.e., City Happenings, website, social media, coffee with the city, etc.)? How do you find out what’s going on and what’s important?

1. Is it easy to get information?

III. AWARENESS AND SATISFACTION WITH CITY PROJECTS

A. We’re going to talk now about something different. I’d like to hear you talk about your impression of how things are going for local government here in Mountlake Terrace.

HANDOUT #1

1. First, when you think of city government, do any projects or initiatives come to mind right away?
2. On a scale of 1 to 5, tell me if you think the City currently provides a high level of services for its residents or a low level of services for its residents (5 is high, 1 is low).
3. Where is City Hall located?

Discuss answers to handouts.

4. Is this a City that has a reputation of getting things done in a proactive manner or not?
5. How does the City set its vision, programs and services? (Does it look at revenues and work backward? Does the city spend too much?)
6. Have you interacted with a City employee with a question or concern recently? What was that experience like? If you haven’t, what do you think customer service is like from the City?
7. What is the City not doing that you would like it to do?

B. What are you hearing about the current financial outlook for the City? (cuts/no cuts/services increasing/have heard nothing?)

1. What have you heard?
2. How do you think things look over the next couple of years for the City? Are revenues increasing? Are we growing? Are you optimistic or pessimistic?
3. Does it seem businesses are choosing Mountlake Terrace as a place for job growth? What evidence do you have of this? What role does the City play in economic development?
4. How does Mountlake Terrace compare to what other cities are facing? (better/worse?)

C. Have there been plans from prior City administrations going back 10-20 years to replace our public facilities?
1. Do you think it's important for the City to replace the community's facilities as they age?
2. As a result of growth, does Mountlake Terrace need to improve some of its existing city facilities or services? Are some facilities neglected? Which ones?
3. Why are improvements necessary? (i.e. police station?)
4. When new city buildings have been built over the years, has that been done because of a vote of the people or by City Council approval? Does this model of voter-approval still work well?

IV. PRIORITIES OF THE COMMUNITY

A. Earlier we talked about the Interim City Hall's current location in the office park at 6100 219th St SW (Redstone Building – former location of University of Phoenix). I'd like to hear more about what you think about this situation. Discuss.

1. First of all, why is the Interim City Hall located here?
2. Are you ok with city offices being located in a rented office park location permanently?
3. If not, what are some alternatives? (Probe: building a civic campus that provides for “one-stop shopping” such as library, fire station, police station, and city hall)

B. Let's talk about the Civic Campus project in more detail. (Show foam board image)

HANDOUT #2

1. When did the idea for a Civic Campus surface for the first time?

2. “When I hear the words ‘Civic Campus project’ I think _____.”

Discuss answers to handouts.

3. What do you know about the Civic Campus space? What will be there?
4. Are these the important projects given our growth and needs?
5. Have you heard anything about the Civic Campus buildings being more energy efficient and sustainable? Is this important?
6. What do you think about having all of these facilities centrally located in one spot vs. spread out around the city? Is this important? What value does it provide for residents? For businesses?
7. What is a reasonable investment for the City to make in a project like this? ($35M, $28M, $25M, $20M) What have you heard? Show handout of costs.

C. If two options were on the table and one option was to seek voter-approved funding for the Civic Campus proposal and one option was to rent space for City Hall/administrative offices in their current location...which do you prefer?
1. Why?

D. Can the City afford the Civic Campus project with current revenue? Can the City afford staying in its rented office space with current revenue?

1. What if you heard that a tax increase would be needed in a couple of years for the City to stay in its rented office space (note: since Civic Campus ballot measure was not approved by voters last November)? What is your reaction to this? Is this a surprise?
2. If you are facing voter-approved funding to continue renting office space for city facilities or providing new funding for the Civic Campus, which do you prefer? Why?

E. What does renting long-term mean to you? Is it acceptable to raise funds for this when the City will never own the buildings?
V. COMMUNICATIONS

A. How many of you would turn to City Happenings to learn more about some of the things we've been talking about tonight?
   1. What do you like/not like about City Happenings?

B. How many of you use Social Media websites on a regular basis? How do you use these sites, like Facebook or Twitter?
   1. When you spend time on Facebook/Twitter, what are you doing?
   2. Have you ever become a Facebook Fan of a local organization or a local government agency? What prompted you to become a Fan?
   3. Would you ever become a Fan of a City Facebook page or Twitter feed? What would make you curious?
      a) What would you want them to be posting about?

VI. WRAP UP

A. What is the most important take-away you have from our discussion tonight?