

CREATING VIBRANT COMMUNITIES

Tucson Virtual Future Leaders Town Hall

October 10, 2020 – Online via Zoom

COMMUNITY STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES

The strongest elements of a healthy and vibrant community here in Tucson are:

1. Social/cultural cohesion – cultural identity, sense of self, social cohesion
2. Environmental quality
3. Transportation options – but only for those with adequate means
4. Affordable housing – but not always quality
5. Community design – in some areas but could be improved

We can build on the strengths of these elements to improve other elements and overall community health by enhancing Tucson's strong social and cultural cohesion through improvement of the built environment so that it will be fully utilized to capitalize on this strength, and to ensure equitable distribution.



Local governments should leverage the local strengths of social and cultural cohesion to expand interaction among people in the different neighborhoods and communities around Tucson and should facilitate opportunities for interactions and humanness. Knowing your neighbor matters.

We can build upon our local strength and enhance social and cultural cohesion via accessible green spaces and community gardens. Also, we might improve density to achieve positive outcomes in other areas of the wheel.

There should be community events in local Tucson neighborhoods like those that happen at the University of Arizona, with a personal touch to enhance community support.

Local, small business locations provide an opportunity for local gatherings.

We could scale the downtown approach to other parts and areas of the community, especially those that are underserved, to develop hubs for local community interactions.

We need to facilitate elimination of barriers to entry to transportation options with a bottom-up approach and enhance public transportation options for those who do not drive cars. The Broadway Overlay might be helpful when completed, but for now the construction is an impediment.

Safety, affordable and quality housing, quality food, and health care are vitally important. Improved access to transportation is needed along with these.

There is a need to improve public safety in Tucson.

There also is a need to enhance accessibility to public education.

CURRENT EVENTS AND VIBRANT COMMUNITIES

COVID-19 has affected every aspect on the wheel, including social cohesion. It has illustrated the need for balance between community interests and individual interests. Racism affects social cohesion. With the combination of COVID-19 and racism, tensions are high.

COVID-19 has ripped off the proverbial band-aid and illustrated how some people pit their interests against those of other and of pockets of ignorance in our society. A primary illustration is in the willingness to wear face coverings.

There are some who exhibit empathy, compassion, and understand the impact on families and seniors who are at risk. On the other hand, there are some who exhibit ignorance, are irresponsible, or prioritize their personal interest in partying or experiencing their desires for community gathering, above the wellbeing of others.

It has demonstrated disparities in healthcare and mental healthcare, particularly affecting communities of color and where we have breakdowns in access to community health.

People are taking notice again of long-standing problems that have been out-of-sight, out-of-mind. We see the exposure to suffering or deprivation of some we didn't know were suffering before.

Social problems that had been below the surface have become exposed. Disparities, inequities, and disproportionalities have been revealed, especially for people of color, minorities, marginalized, and low-income communities.

Work styles and lifestyles have changed as a result of the pandemic. It is difficult to go to the park or out to coffee with others. People who are able to work are working longer hours, and lifestyles have changed.

Social privilege has become particularly evident in who can access the internet for videoconferencing or to work remotely.

We see clearly that socioeconomic status is related to race. There have been disparate impacts in communities of some races and ethnicities that have more multi-generational housing.

There is a lack of resources among communities of color to healthcare including: preventive care, mental healthcare, access to internet for school or libraries or to work, and access to transportation.

We realize how local governments need to work together to improve outcomes that are more equitable.

We need to approach each public issue with comprehensive solutions. For example, too much has been dumped off on police, who are called upon to deal not only with crime, but also with mental health and homelessness. We can deal with each of these through different means.

Community design is important. It can be used to segregate and isolate people, or in the alternative to break down barriers. The downtown community design, and what is planned for Broadway, enhance access and need to be replicated in other areas.

Many people do not know their neighbors. This became apparent during protests against racism in which people met neighbors they had not previously known.

Communities cannot ignore racism anymore. We all need to talk about it.

Neighborhood community associations are important to engage in both advocacy and social connections. We need to build on these to provide individuals training to foster community.

We need to enhance online infrastructure. The NextDoor app facilitates neighborhood associations online.

We need novel approaches, such as for example what Meals on Wheels has done to identify neighbors who can help those near them.

WHAT I WOULD TELL ARIZONA'S ELECTED LEADERS

Vibrant communities require everyone to be brought together so that everyone can thrive. We need to focus with intentionality in the planning process on the health and wellbeing of the community as a whole.

State, county, and local municipal governmental entities should be legislatively required to exercise intentionality and engage in long-term planning about the elements it takes to make a vibrant community that benefits all. This should have to be included in the comprehensive plans for cities and counties.

Diversity is critical to a vibrant community. Local government leaders need to do outreach and to plan for underprivileged areas of the community to provide them the resources they need. In particular, we need more local governmental funding for resources to serve and empower low-income households.

Broadband internet access is needed by all, and it should be made available to all as a local municipal utility at a price all can afford.

We also need broad access to healthcare, education, and transportation.

With regards to transportation, we need more sidewalks, better roads, and better, more accessible public transportation, including streetcars.

We need “justice reinvestment” to spend our local government resources generated through taxes less on police and other aspects of the criminal justice system, including incarceration, and more on social programs to meet needs. We could better utilize neighborhood watch programs to help enhance public safety with less formal policing.

We need more transparency with regards to public allocation of funds so that the public better understands these allocations and can see that justice reinvestment is achieved.

We need to help struggling families and individuals so that we can bring everyone together as a community in a way that strengthens our cultural and social cohesion.

We need social programs to better meet the needs of our community.

We need more diversity of housing, including mixed-use, multi-family “missing middle” housing (not necessarily high-rise), inclusive housing that could facilitate spaces to gather for neighborhood and block parties to enhance social cohesion with more equitable access to resources.

Environmental quality is essential to a vibrant community. Environmental quality is negatively affected by climate change, and we need to focus on the populations most affected.

TAKING ACTION

The most important actions that should be taken to make our community healthier and more vibrant are:

- Enhancing social cohesion and equity of resource allocation.
- In particular, we need local governments—including the county and local municipalities—to engage in planning and resource re-allocation that focuses upon equitable access to all critical resources and services, in particular including quality housing with opportunities for neighborhood and local social engagement, transportation, health care, mental healthcare, education, and public safety.
- Specifics that were unanimously agreed upon include universal access to broadband internet, public transportation, health care, mental healthcare, and education.
- Also, it was unanimously agreed that we need to protect the environment.
- All of these governmental actions must be undertaken in a manner that acknowledges and intentionally commits to eliminating structural racism and socio-economic inequities among communities of color.

Recognizing that the power to change the future begins with each individual, participants committed to take personal actions based on their experience and discussions during the Tucson Virtual Future Leaders Town Hall. Below are individual actions that were shared.

I WILL...

- Think of the Elements of a Healthy Community model when I participate in conversations in Tucson Young Professionals and try to focus.
- Advocate for community design projects that lead to better social and health outcomes.
- Utilize methods of participation used by Arizona Town Hall in future public engagement activities.
- Use my experience in this Town Hall to help shape public engagement in my own planning.
- Be keen to read more on everything related to creating a vibrant community that helps me in my field which is urban planning.