



South Tacoma Neighborhood Plan



COMMUNITY INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Background:

The City of Tacoma’s Neighborhood Planning Program (NPP) was created by City Council in 2021. The Program brings together community organizations, businesses, residents, City departments, and partner agencies to identify a vision for the future—and then helps to implement that vision. These actions, ranging from short- to long-term projects, are aligned with other City programs and policies.

Before launching the South Tacoma Neighborhood Plan, we held community interviews to better understand assets, issues, and community engagement opportunities. This document summarizes some of the key themes that we heard during those interviews.

The goal of these conversations with the community was to:

- Build relationships with existing community organizations and individuals who are active in South Tacoma
- Learn about additional voices that are often overlooked or excluded
- Share information about the South Tacoma Neighborhood Plan and how people in South Tacoma can get involved
- Listen to the community about their perspectives on the assets, challenges, and opportunities in South Tacoma
- Hear ideas for how to engage with the community going forward in a manner that is meaningful, respectful, and trauma-informed

Interview Participants:

We interviewed 13 people/organizations reflective of the following perspectives and backgrounds:

- People who own/work for a business in South Tacoma: 3
- People who rent or own a home in South Tacoma: 9
- People that are members of immigrant and/or refugee communities: 2
- People associated with community groups and/or are social service providers: 1
- People associated with local institutions: 4

- People associated with business/manufacturing perspectives in South Tacoma: 2

**Note that the total number of engagements does not equal 13 because people/organizations fit into multiple categories of backgrounds and perspectives.*

Outreach and Methodology:

We reached out to 19 organizations, institutions, and people who live, work, worship, and play in South Tacoma to request a 45-minute interview. We offered conversations in-person, over the phone, or virtually via a platform of the community member’s choosing. We identified potential community members through word of mouth, coordination with other City of Tacoma or partner staff working in South Tacoma, and research into interested/affected people and groups . During the interviews, we took notes on key themes, which are reflected in the “What We Heard” section below.

Conversation Topics:

In our conversations, we used a semi-structured survey tool to ask people about:

- How they are connected to South Tacoma
- What they love about South Tacoma, key neighborhood landmarks, and the neighborhood’s “center”
- What issues or concerns they have about the neighborhood that could be addressed through Neighborhood Planning
- How past interactions with the City or other partners had gone, and what that engagement should look like going forward
- Their interest in ongoing involvement with the Neighborhood Plan
- Other key neighborhood voices we should reach out to for an interview

CONVERSATIONS WITH COMMUNITIES: WHAT WE HEARD

Key takeaways	What we heard in our conversations with you
ASSETS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing affordability <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Interviewees felt that South Tacoma was one of the few places in the City with opportunities for attainable home ownership ○ The South Tacoma business district remains relatively affordable for small businesses • Spaces and places that build community <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Non-profit community centers: STAR Center; Asia Pacific Cultural Center (APCC) ○ Open spaces and green spaces: South Park, Wapato Hills, Manitou Park, and skate parks ○ Businesses that bring people together to share ideas and art, such as legacy bars and live event spaces <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>“I love the places to gather in South Tacoma...the Edison Ale House is a great social hub to meet neighbors, and they do a really good job to keeping the space inviting.”</i>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community-mindedness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Many charitable organizations, such as Habitat for Humanity and faith communities ○ Many feel a sense of social belonging and are comfortable sitting out on their porches • A Diverse/Multicultural Community: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ South Tacoma takes pride in its vibrant and diverse business district with its variety of business types and sizes, activities, and events they offer, as well as diversity of management and ownership, including several immigrant and refugee-owned businesses ○ Many interviewees celebrated the vibrancy of the South Tacoma community, and noted safe spaces for BIPOC and queer community • Connectivity provided by Sounder commuter rail and I-5 • Historic buildings and heritage spaces <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>“South Tacoma has a lot of cute old houses with a bunch of history... Manitou Elementary is a cool building, and there is a funky cemetery and great restaurants and dive bars.”</i>
CHALLENGES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mobility safety and public transportation connectivity issues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Speeding traffic, especially on arterials, makes it harder to walk <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>“...to get to the STAR center or other crucial areas, it is all hectic traffic. There are signs that say: ‘do not cross this road’, but that’s where I live!”</i> ○ Incomplete bike lane implementation; network improvement needed ○ Poor sidewalk condition and connectivity, including ADA ○ Need for traffic calming and traffic signal management ○ More opportunities for public and active transportation instead of auto-centrism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>“Public Transit access is one of the biggest concerns for a lot of folks in this neighborhood... There are lot of folks that take public transit but have a hard time getting to the other neighborhoods. South Tacoma Way is a straight shot to many other parts of Tacoma, but it still takes forever to get anywhere by transit.”</i> ▪ <i>“There are a lot of hills but not much greenery, and bus stops are not accessible—especially for wheeled people.”</i> • Crime and personal safety <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Fast-moving car-dominated space creates a lack of eyes on the street ○ Crime and vandalism impact local businesses ○ Som people find it scary to walk home or to the car from work at night; poor night/street lighting contributes to this concern ○ Shootings in business district ○ Concern about the need for services for people experiencing homelessness

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Perceived food desert/food swamp; lack of pharmacies ○ Concern over the surplus of the Madison Early Learning Center (Tacoma Public Schools facility) • Open space, green space, and environment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Protecting open space and aquifers/groundwater ○ Increasing tree canopy ○ Desire for more community gardens ○ Reducing impermeable and polluted surfaces ○ Mitigating industrial impacts, e.g. long-term impacts of the Bridge Industrial Warehouse development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>It is really nice to be able to dream up the spaces that we really want to have, but it is intimidating with the [Bridge Industrial] warehouse looming on the horizon.</i> • Systemic inequities and building community trust in the City and partners <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>“...sometimes it feels like the city is designed for particular people. I want the city to facilitate resources for the community, not be dictating what happens—centering on the things for the people that live in the community.”</i> • Business district resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Diversity of business district leadership and voice • New development: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Concerns about new residential and/or commercial development driving gentrification/displacement ○ Concerns about new industrial development impacting environmental quality
<p>OPPORTUNITIES</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infill development of unnecessary parking lots and replacing them with greenspace or amenities/services/housing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>“I like the gardens in the middle of the concrete jungles that I see in other cities. I think a lot of those little gardens in other cities are managed by many cultures... like a labyrinth or some structure where people can walk in beauty and reflection”</i> • Improvement/Expansion of Existing Community Space <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Construction of the new APCC ○ Potential expansion of the South Tacoma Library into the Fire Station next door ○ Improvement to the Sounder Station Area and opportunities for new housing development nearby • Business district potential <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Further increasing resources for incubating new small and/or BIPOC- and women-owned businesses ○ Resources to improve district appearances through litter and trash receptacle management, as well as hanging plants and other beautification efforts • Community murals or other community art to create placemaking and discourage graffiti and/or vandalizing

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Industrial revitalization <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Interviewees expressed interest in the low-barrier and meaningful pay provided by industrial jobs ○ Greater utilization/electrifying rail in the industrial area to reduce trucking emissions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>“There is also potential to electrify trains as the port also electrifies ships that are parked in port.”</i> ● Doubling-down investment in South Tacoma: increased investment from the City and partners spurred by planning efforts as well as greater community capacity for generating community-owned services and businesses
<p>MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES AND IDEAS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Compensation and respecting the community’s time <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Consider ways to compensate community members for special efforts in the planning process ○ Anticipate and understand community exhaustion caused by repeated engagement and slow results ● Coordinating recent planning efforts in the community <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Connect past efforts for the Tacoma Mall Subarea Plan with the South Tacoma Neighborhood Plan ● Business District Association: Coordinate with the existing organization, and connect with other businesses that are not yet connected to the group ● Acknowledge past and present structural wrongs and create space for discussion by including and listening to disadvantaged communities and voices that don’t always get heard <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Youth engagement in both visioning and implementation processes ○ People disproportionately impacted by environmental injustices ○ Balancing the perspectives of people that have lived in the community for a long time vs. newcomers ○ Some people will always be afraid of change; listen beyond the loud voices ○ Some community event organizers feel that people only show up when there are negative issues the community is facing being discussed, and want to find ways to utilize this energy to bring community together constructively ○ Engage with community members knowing that some of the issues that come up (e.g., community safety) can be associated with trauma for some people ● Show up at existing community meetings and events: show community members that the City and its partners are attending community spaces on community terms and listening (e.g. Santa Parade, car shows, art and cultural events, etc.) ● Utilize and reinforce existing community meeting spaces (e.g., STAR Center, SURGE, Edison Square, local businesses) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>“Do a ‘small business takeover’... to bring in more business as well as bring attention to the community”</i> ● Conduct meetings at accessible times and spaces