



Summary Report

City Manager's Listening Session **Topic: Neighborhood Outreach** Thursday, August 16, 2018 | 6:00pm – 8:00pm Mt. Zion Community Fellowship Center

On Thursday, August 16, 2018, the City Manager held a community listening session to discuss *Neighborhood Outreach* in the City of Oberlin. This was the first of several listening sessions to be held, covering various topics. Approximately 48 individuals attended the August 16th session, including residents, City Councilmembers, City staff, representatives from non-profit organizations, City board/commission members, and members of the local media. Participants were encouraged to network with each other, and with City staff and non-profit organizations from 6:00pm-6:20pm.

The City Manager explained that the purpose of the listening session was to better understand what is important to the community. To facilitate the discussion, three questions were posed to the group:

- What does neighborhood outreach mean to you?
- What does the City do well?
- How can the City improve?

Participants were to respond to the questions individually from 6:25pm-6:35pm and then discuss the responses in small groups from 6:40pm-7:00pm. From 7:00pm-8:00pm, a large group discussion ensued, responding to the questions posed above. The following are key points gathered from responses to each question:

What does neighborhood outreach mean to you?

Neighborhood outreach involves creating a welcoming, non-threatening environment by identifying and meeting the needs of the people in the community, being responsive to issues and providing effective communication to the community. It is important that representatives from the City develop and maintain relationships within the community by meeting with residents in their neighborhoods, attending community events and by providing residents with the ability to associate a face with any concerns. The City's outreach efforts should ensure that community members understand how to express concerns effectively and to provide feedback to key decision makers about public policy and City projects. Neighborhood outreach should also involve connecting residents with various resources, both within Oberlin and in surrounding areas, in addition to providing excellent City infrastructure, services, and programs.

What does the City do well?

The City provides consistent and high quality services to residents, including unique services to assist those with differing needs (caring fund, utility payment extensions, rear yard refuse collection for elderly or infirmed residents, etc.). The City is seen as financially responsible, yet civic-minded in providing funding to various non-profit organizations providing services to residents. The beautification and upkeep of the City is noticeable, including green space, planters, street sweeping, sidewalk cleaning, etc. Friendly and helpful City staff has assisted in building and maintaining trust between residents and the City, and staff being open and responsive to new ideas is appreciated. Specific areas of note include improvements in code enforcement and recreation programming providing positive experiences for young people and adults.

Information and updates about City projects, services, programs and events are appreciated, as well as the varying methods of communication used to disseminate information (newspaper, cable channel, mail, flyers, social media, etc.). The various citywide events are seen as positive ways to encourage community involvement and it is valuable to see City staff and Councilmembers attending these events. It is also viewed positively that City Council and the administration are easily accessible, and that City Council and board/commission meetings are open meetings so that residents can express concerns or give accolades to Council and/or staff.

How can the City improve?

The City's communication efforts can be improved upon, including providing better communication and promotion of programming and events, increasing the City's social media presence, and developing programming for new residents so they are more aware of City programs and services available to them. Improving communication within the City organization itself would be beneficial in disseminating accurate information more efficiently. It was also suggested that information regarding which department to contact for a specific issue and how to contact the department should be more easily accessible, particularly regarding non-emergency concerns.

The City's town gown relationships can be improved by the City positively working with Oberlin College administration, faculty and students. The City can also improve organizational relationships by encouraging more collaboration with non-profit organizations to share resources within the community.

Additionally, the City can improve in areas related to expanding public transportation options, increasing bicycle parking areas, expanding affordable housing within the City and enhancing regional economic planning with surrounding cities. More enforcement of traffic laws is sought, as well as more interaction with Patrol Officers. There is a desire for residents to get to know the Patrol Officers in the City. Other specific suggestions include expanding recreation programming, specifically for those ages 12-16, expanding brush collection for residents, perhaps to once per month, and continuing improvements to code enforcement. These improvements related to code enforcement should also include providing education to landlords and tenants regarding responsibilities and rights, respectively.

Other specific suggestions include the City communicating positive impacts and successes to the community, establishing informal "office hours" for City Councilmembers and staff to meet with residents at varying locations throughout the City, and to encourage more active community members to invite others to be involved in the community with them.