# LGBTQ Town Hall April 12, 2010

# **Greater Themes**

- While Portland is a culturally rich city, the city lacks the racial and ethnic diversity found in other large US cities. Simultaneously, the quality of life in Portland was identified as being very high compared to other cities. Portland should promote an equitable distribution of this quality of life and continue outreach to everyone in order to attract diverse individuals to the city and make all community members feel safe and welcome.
- Everyone should have the opportunity to live a healthy life, but health care is not equal for all. There are many non profit organizations that support the LGBTQ community, but much of this support is focused on HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment. While health care is too expensive for most Portlanders to afford, transgender individuals experience some of the most immense hardships regarding health care. The ability to afford health care is intricately linked to living-wage job opportunities.
- Participants generally recognized that Portland is an overall safe and accepting place for LGBTQ individuals, especially when compared with other areas of the state and country. However, transgender individuals have more and unique safety-related concerns. Also, several factors contribute to creating either the perception or actual lack of safety for LGBTQ individuals. These factors include: geography and time of day (participants feel less safe downtown at night); public abuse of drugs or alcohol; homelessness; and distrust of the Portland Police.
- Concerns regarding the Portland Police Bureau (PPB) were expressed. Overall, opinions
  were split. Some citizens were confident that the police were justly protecting the city,
  while others expressed concern of recent events and the use of police force. Suggestions
  for improvement include:
  - o integration of the police into the community;
  - o cultural competency training (regarding both race and gender/sexual orientation);
  - o diversifying the police force;
  - o more police participation in cultural events like gay pride; and,
  - o encouraging officers to live within the boundaries of the City of Portland.
- Community building was a strong theme that participants discussed in relation to improving relations between Portlanders and the Portland Police Bureau, improving the quality of life for LGBTQ youth and adults, and extending access to a higher quality of life to all Portlanders. To encourage community interaction, participants spoke to the possibilities of creating more spaces where people interact, like parks, neighborhood block parties, community gardens, and mixed-income and mixed-use neighborhoods. Creative affordable housing methods need to be implemented to meet the diverse housing needs of the region; including mixed income buildings.

- The city's outreach efforts still need to be increased. The city should look at going to where people already congregate in order to reach out to those groups who are not participating. Those who work on outreach should also participate in cultural competency training. To make sure that outreach is successful and that public participation is worthwhile, town hall participants voiced strong opinions about ensuring transparency, accountability, and follow through on the feedback received by the communities who participate.
- More attention needs to be given to the queer youth through out the city. Queer youth experience higher drop out rates and homelessness. Isolation is an issue for anyone identifying as LGBTQ, but youth particularly struggle with this social isolation. More support systems need to be in place to mentor and council queer youth in need.
- Queer youth face particular challenges with isolation and high risk of dropping out of school or losing housing. When developing social service programs and budgets, attention should be paid to the unique needs of LGBTQ youth and support given to the organizations that work with LGBTQ youth.

# Issues Corral: What issues did you come to discuss?

- Police
- School redesign
- Jobs, manufacturing
- Safety
- Housing, homelessness
- Health care
- Downtown vitality/small business
- City budget/public safety
- Gay marriage as a priority for the LGBTQ community should it be?
- Higher education
- Visibility/turf (No more Stark Street)
- Queer youth in schools
- Queer youth as homeless
- Cultural competency in health care
- Diversity
- Gentrification
- Leadership development
- Inequality in schools
- Health access

# Poll results: What issue is most important to you?

- 1. Health
- 2. Equity
- 3. Education
- 4. Prosperity

# **Group Discussion Notes**

organized by action area

# **Equity, Civic Engagement, & Quality of Life**

#### Equity

- We need to break down the social hierarchy that exists (with white and native-Oregonian [i.e. a white person that was born in Oregon] at the top of the hierarchy).
- o Equity means something different to the LGBTQ community than it does to the rest of Portland.
- o Education regarding diversity is a constant and on-going process.
- O Historically, restraints on property ownership have caused pockets of non-diversity, resulting in homogenous communities. For example, neighborhoods in the Boise area were traditionally black, but those minorities were pushed out. Gentrification happens everywhere, so how do we make it fair for everyone?
- o "Liberal" hasn't meant equal treatment for all.
- o All voices should be heard and equal.
- o Concerns regarding segregation and lack of racial and economic distribution.
- o Mayor and City Council should go out in public "black" and witness racial issues.
- o All levels of government need to raise awareness of equity issues. Public education is a government role.
- o Tax credits to support business diversity, perhaps operating on a credit system.
- o Affirmative action for gays.

#### • Diversity

- o Use LGBTQ as an avenue to discuss diversity.
- o In other cities, gay couples help bring diversity to neighborhoods.
- o Racism is still a big problem throughout the city.
- o We need to create more diversity, not just "tokenize."
- o Portland is culturally rich, but lacks some diversity.
- o The stereotype of LGBTQ is wealthy and white, but this is not the reality.
- o We need education about how to be a straight ally.
- o Portland is becoming more accepting and open-minded.
- o Gay community is strongest in Portland's North and Northeast quadrants.
- o How to be diverse on a statewide level, outside of Portland.
- O Diversity is spreading in Portland. For example, the SE 122<sup>nd</sup> area now contains a significant Asian population.
- Lack of diversity- people might want to leave because they don't feel like they fit
  in. There is a lack of diversity which prevents new people of color from moving
  here.
- o In the queer community, racial prejudice is rampant.

#### • Ouality of Life

- O Quality of life in Portland is high. It is either as good or better than that of the San Francisco Bay area and much more affordable.
- o The quality of life in Portland as much better than that of Austin, TX because of the natural amenities.

- One individual moved from TX specifically for quality of life and greatly appreciates it.
- o Portland is more livable then NYC and LA. In Portland, you can have a greater quality of life on less money.
- o The pace of life in Portland is slower. People are friendly and helpful. This contributes to our high quality of life.
- Quality of life is also about being within close proximity of and having access to daily needs (grocery stores, health care, etc). This allows for a high level of selfdetermination. Access is ultimately an equity concern.
- o Equity and quality of life are also about resources, and making sure we have meaningful access to daily needs.
- When you compare Portland to Miami, Portland is significantly more racist than Miami.
- o Quality of life encompasses the ability to set goals and have opportunities to achieve.
- o A progressive community translates into a good quality of life.
- o The definition of quality of life is vague and different to everyone. How do you define it?
- o Parks are fundamental to quality of life and equity. All people should be able to utilize and enjoy parks.
- o Living in a place where more people can have a "piece of the pie" translates into better quality of life.
- o Portland should take pride its "quirkiness."
- The major threat to our quality of life is the economy and the lack of jobs.
   Particular attention should be paid to the diminishing number of manufacturing jobs.
- o Aesthetically, there any many beautiful districts and neighborhoods.
- o Portland is pet-friendly.
- o Block parties are positive community-building events. We should promote more block parties.
- o Isolation is a problem for individuals of the LGBTQ community, no matter their age. How do we minimize this isolation and its effects?

### • Civic Engagement

- There needs to be a stronger focus on queer youth. More youth outreach should be conducted. Maybe SMYRC could partner with PPS or other non-profits to provide services.
- There is a lack of cultural competency regarding LGBTQ in our public services. City staff needs more cultural competency training.
- o Community policing may be one way to start a conversation about diversity and give common control in neighborhood.
- Outreach should be done where people already congregate.
- There should be more widespread publication/advertisement of public commissions/advisory boards so that a broader swath of the community can be represented on those bodies.
- o City decision-makers should be of more diverse backgrounds.

- City decision-makers need to better understand who is being left out in outreach efforts.
- o There is a lack of communication between the city bureaus and the public.
- o The average citizen needs an easier way to be involved in the public process.
- o Trainings to learn how to be a victim advocate would be helpful. Gay men have not been getting involved.
- o Spread word regarding public commissions directly.
- o Work with APANO
- Overall concern regarding insufficiency of government services/programs including schools.
- o The Sexual Minority Round Table (SMRT) is very effective.
- o The city needs to always be aware of what is going on within the gay community and keep the conversation going.
- o What can different government agencies do to contribute to equity?
- o There is not a lot of multi-lingual outreach.
- o Turnout at the Town hall contained large concentrations of younger and poorer folks. Ethnic minorities and the elderly lacked sufficient representation.
- o Give attention to those issues important to all in the LGBTQ community. Many younger queer people are not interested in marriage equality, but so much money and energy is allocated toward the cause.
- o Gay marriage is only one issue. It doesn't address race, jobs, transgender issues, or bigger equity issues.
- o Being "out" is a bigger deal than marriage equality. We need to start at the beginning.
- o We need to promote the basics of equality. We shouldn't invest as much in marriage campaigns, but in campaigns promoting other basic rights.
- o Campaigns reflect the views of those with political power and wealth.
- o Collaborate or use public outreach to resolve equity issues.
- o How do we connect queer organizations with non-queer organizations?
- o How do we connect urban queer organizations with rural communities?
- o We are a small town so a small group can make a big difference.
- o How do queers meet other queers without it happening through online communities?
- Multnomah County has been impressive in their efforts to be progressive and address equity.
- We are complacent when we're doing well, but more people still need to empower themselves.
- o Portland offers more democracy for all than most places.
- o No voice for the average citizen. You need to know someone.
- o Government acknowledgement of LGBTQ is good and follow up is needed.
- o Progressive City Council, but big donors who support a candidate often dictate the key concerns and race is not raised as an important issue.
- o There is a decline in community services and funding. Budget cuts have reduced the number of employee cultural competency training sessions.
- O Conversations about diversity though town halls, including discussions on race and homophobia.

- Some individuals recognized a tension between Portland natives versus outsiders. Natives need to be welcoming to newcomers. Our attitudes affect businesses thinking of moving here. Hospitality is important.
- The city can't just talk about racism; they must address it in actions.
- If their problems are not addressed, the young, homeless will likely riot.
- It is important to be forward about our flaws as a city and the existing inequalities.
- Live and let live; strip joints should be allowed.

# Human Health, Food, and Public Safety

#### • Human Health

- o CAP does good job, specifically with health and testing.
- o Concern regarding decline in support for public services, including mental health.
- o Portland's doing better than other areas of the country. There is good access to low income clinics.
- o We should reprioritize to support public safety and mental healthcare.
- o Mental health services also get cut. Rather than treating our mentally ill, they go to jail. People in law enforcement and social services jobs are under pressure.
- o OHSU does a good job offering services.
- o The transgendered community has difficulty accessing services.
- o We need more services for seniors and the disabled.
- o What health services are available to young people?
- We need more community health clinics.
- o Need for a queer health community clinic.
- o Low income and elderly need health services.
- o Health care professionals need to be more aware and sensitive to alternative needs
- o There needs to be more outreach to educate the public on available services.
- o Promote a conversation regarding health education.
- o There is a gap in services. CAP is great, but does not address the needs of lesbians.
- o All social services are too costly.
- o Now is the time to encourage the county to really focus on expanding programs to minorities. The City has the weight to throw behind these issues.
- O People living on streets, young people in school, older people with nowhere to go. We should take care of each other here to increase the quality of life. These things are intimately connected.
- o Participants expressed frustration with the waiting time for new clients to acquire health insurance coverage. One client cited being deferred for several months.
- o Lack of health care limits opportunity. Non-healthy people have fewer options.
- o Create a "public option" on a local level.
- o The self-employed have a hard time paying for health care.
- o There needs to be a sliding scale of paying for health care.
- o Those who fall in between subsidized health care and affording health care get the squeeze. It is the same situation with housing.

- o Transgender individuals have an even harder time accessing health care. Health care should be required for all and no one should be excluded!
- o Health insurance is a stressful burden.
- o Health care is expensive, even for emergency cases.
- o Affordable healthcare is a big problem, especially mental care.
- o We need a common health plan for preventive care.
- o Mental health is a big problem and many people do not have the insurance coverage to deal with it.
- o Portland's small business focus is also why a lot of people don't have health care. How can the city help support these small businesses?
- o Small business leaders can't afford health care.
- o More living wage jobs would help promote our goals with health and wellness.
- O Human health is about the economics of what people make and what they need to pay for health insurance. Vast majority of participants at the workshop reported making \$50,000 or less.
- o We should reevaluate the definitions of poverty.
- o Many homeless are disabled and may not have family to support them.
- o LGBTQ community drinks more and smokes more. This is partially stress related.
- o Question of cultural competency for social services. There is not enough training.

#### • Public Safety

- Portland represents a world of improvement from the Deep South. People feel comfortable holding hands with their same-sex partner in public. It is even safe in Tualatin. The heart of our metro area is accepting.
- o While there is a high level of comfort in the core of the city, less so further from core
- o There is a feeling of safety in Portland and outside Metro.
- o Aspiration for safety all over.
- o Appreciate the openness in Portland.
- o Feels safe in own neighborhood.
- o Acceptance of queers has grown within the last 20 years
- o Portland feels very safe.
- o Feeling of safety in many neighborhoods.
- o Many feel comfortable openly showing affection and want to preserve this quality of life which is much more liberal than other places.
- o Generally Portland feels very safe, but not in every neighborhood. Farther east is much more conservative and doesn't feel as safe.
- o Most people feel safe in their neighborhood.
- o Holding hands on Foster is okay and safe.
- A newcomer to Portland verbalized her surprise regarding the magnitude of the homeless population. She added that the issue of homelessness makes her hesitant to walk anywhere.
- Not safe around Old Town.
- o There is a feeling that that a lot of incidents are not reported.
- One man reported being gay bashed twice, adding he feels less secure in East Portland.
- o Safety issues downtown often involve drugs.

- o Transgender community experiences the most safety issues
- o Cannot have safety without sidewalks.
- o Difficult to report property crime, hard to know how to do it.
- o The industrial areas at night are scary.
- o Sellwood is safe, neighbors watch out for one another.
- o Wouldn't be alone downtown at night.
- o People who are drunk, especially in Chinatown, can be hostile, even more so during holidays, festivals, and nighttime hours
- o Riding MAX at night, drunks are intimidating.
- o Gay bashing incidents after Pride Festival last year was discussed.
- o Safety is a big concern particularly in winter when it gets dark earlier.

#### Police

- o Some have had especially positive experiences working with police regarding demonstrating protection for all.
- o Feel that police are fair during gay pride.
- o Police make Portland feel safe.
- o Some voiced positive views of police.
- o Really like that police participate in Gay Pride.
- o Friend who has five children, all black, and warns them to be careful with police.
- o Fear of Police Bureau for the mentally impaired.
- o Nervous for friends with mental health illnesses.
- o Persistent acting out of police regarding race, and it is terrifying.
- o Police Bureau use of derogatory terms.
- Some males report concerns about police addressing domestic violence with gay males.
- o Terrified by recent police events, especially considering has child of color.
- o Safe from whom? Less safe with police, never lived in a place where police are so intimidating.
- o Police do not make citizens feel safe. What can be done about that?
- o Residents are just as scared as they are relieved when an officer shows up.
- o Concern regarding attitudes on police force.
- o Concern expressed about the perceived silence by City Council.
- o Police are too confrontational. One man spoke of how a gun was pulled on him for no reason. Police were looking for a suspect, but it wasn't him.
- o Police seem like old boys club.
- o Police have a lack of clear leadership.
- o Police don't live in Portland; they live in the suburbs.
- o If police don't live here because it is too expensive, then the city should subsidize their housing.
- o How can we make the police more part of the community, not just drive home far away. They need to be "accountable" in the community.
- o The police should do more outreach to queer communities
- o We need better representation of minorities in police, gay and lesbian officers.
- o Are the police open to recruiting minorities? LGBTQ?
- o What is a good way to identify a queer officer?

- Connect with the communities and police in general. The police have a terrible job.
- o Feeling of wanting to avoid police. This may be, in part, just a public relations issue.
- o There is a disconnect between community and police.
- o Police force lacks good customer service.
- o Wants to know more about issues with police.
- o Would like more opportunities for 1-on-1 interaction with police.
- What can be done to create a stronger relationship between the police and the queer community? Solutions may include educating the police, sensitivity training, and alliance building.
- Public safety and feeling safe in the community, including legal rights and law enforcement.

# **Transportation, Technology & Access**

- Free Rail Zone is fundamental to providing access to individuals of low income.
- In an ideal world, all residents would be able walk to all that they want and need.
- There are concerns for people with disabilities in terms of accessibility and easy transportation.
- All of us will be elderly and will have to rethink the way we get around and methods of transportation.
- There are not many ways for people to get to facilities outside of downtown.

# Design, Planning, & Public Spaces

- Interaction between users of public space is an important aspect of urban life.
- Mixed uses- who gets to be in them?
- What about mixed income buildings? This kind of development does not happen except in artistic neighborhoods.
- Create safe spaces for the queer community focusing on youth and accessibility.
- Highlight social interaction and natural spaces.
- More green space needed in East Portland.
- Portland is ghettoizing and it's not good.

#### The Arts, Culture, & Innovation

- Umbrella group for community events can help when non profit status is required.
- Find creative ways to fund the arts (i.e. hotel tax).
- Portland has great attendance rates at art-related events (second in the country), but this doesn't always transfer into dollars.
- There is more funding for the arts in the Bay Area. One creative way they do it is with a hotel tax.
- Non-profits could flourish in incubation space.
- SE Uplift and ONI should do more to assist with insurance.

- The government should encourage landlords to use vacant space (through taxes or incentives).
- We need more fiscal sponsorship for community and neighborhood events.
- Portland has many free concerts (i.e. symphony in the parks) with great attendance, but doesn't translate into financial support.
- City presence is encouraged at film festivals. Overall, there should be more City involvement in the cultural fabric of Portland.
- Some people were shocked by the lack of visibility of city at arts festivals and events.
- Parking and transit issues downtown might deter people from attending arts events.
- Rose festival, farmers markets, block parties, and similar events are all positive for the community.
- Participants expressed appreciation for the Sunday Parkways.
- There are lots of activities regarding the arts in Portland.

# **Sustainability and the Natural Environment**

- Important to pay attention to environment.
- Attendees were surprised by the fact that 70% of energy in Portland is produced by burning coal.
- Care of the environment needs to be better addressed.

#### **Education and Skill Development**

- All kids deserve a quality education.
- Fixing education solves a lot of other problems.
- There should be more bilingual staff in PPS.
- There are concerns for the quality of schools, especially given the High School redesign.

#### **Prosperity & Business Success**

- Promote programs for queers to access business services and connect with PDC.
- The LGBTQ community lacks financial support.
- Non-profits struggle against powerful businesses. Partnerships should be created between non-profits and big business.
- Government choices can help non-profits and art organizations start-up through incubation space
- Encourage property owners to allow use of empty space.
- Unions help to equalize pay, provide, and protect jobs. We need more union jobs.
- Many native Portlanders have a hostile attitude toward outsiders. Our local economy and business development is hurt by this tension. Local attitudes scare away businesses. We need to brief people on the importance of hospitality.
- Discrimination on the job and during the hiring process is too prevalent.
- Laws to combat discrimination (in the workplace) are not enforceable.

# **Neighborhoods & Housing**

- Homelessness is a huge issue in Portland.
- The magnitude of the homeless population does not seem to reflect our local values system.
- Homelessness is a big problem for queer youth, as well. Forty percent of homeless youth in Portland identify as queer.
- Homeless youth and elderly are not cared for, thereby diminishing the overall quality of life in the city. The quality of all our lives is connected.
- There is a need for more affordable housing.
- There is a long waiting list for nice low-income housing.
- Creative affordable housing should be a part of city planning.
- Mixed income buildings are the preferred method for affordable housing. Don't separate income levels.
- The cost of living is going up (housing, food, lack of employment). How long can I afford to live here?
- There needs to be a county-wide focus with regards to housing and recovery services which focus on the LGBTQ community.
- Complaints of car camping in residential neighborhoods, specifically the Mt. Scott neighborhood.
- It would be great to have a gay neighborhood district. Our current presence on Stark Street is disappearing (housing, cafes, businesses). What can the city do about this?
- There is no community district for gays. Queer presence on Stark Street is disappearing.
- LGBTQ do not concentrate in one place.
- Participants were surprised by the number of people per household. A discussion occurred about what may be causing the current trends.

## **Comments Regarding the Portland Plan:**

- Complaint that there is a lack of knowledge regarding the Portland Plan process. The city should address this.
- Promote access of general Portland Plan events.
- Don't forget low income individuals and those less represented. Ensure that they are heard as well.
- The City encourages citizens to participate.
- Elected city leaders being "at large" [as opposed to elected to representing a specific part of town] means leaders are more easily accessible.
- Hope that City doesn't lose core values as we work out nitty gritty details.
- Encourage outreach by city government, and especially to the LGBTQ community, gives hope that ideas are listened to.
- Move beyond "achieving equality" and experience it through cultural competency.
- Go to the people, go where they congregate so people don't have to get out of their comfort zone.
- If gays did not show up at the workshop then that means there was not enough outreach done.
- It is important to focus on the transparency in government.

- How can the city show participants that the community's concerns are heard and incorporated into future planning? How can the city follow-up? How can we, as citizens be sure that our voices are being accounted for?
- Follow-up should include monitoring action areas and how plan has succeeded in meeting those objectives.
- Plan focuses too much on tangible structures and 3-D aspects of quality of life. We already have our physical infrastructure. We need to focus on the things that are not visible.