

## Reflection Notes Public Forum 3/28 smg – Susan Gallant, Forum Facilitator

### What I heard was:

#### Town Council:

- Acknowledged unintended consequences
- Said they were committed to change
- Acknowledged they are aware there are flaws in the process
- Acknowledged communication is not working as intended, including context and assumptions made that informed decision making
- Shared the dilemma of setting policy in a way that is fair to all parties
- Said they would talk about a moratorium on new permits, but did not commit

#### Residents

- Wondering if forum was just another way to appease them
- They didn't understand what they perceived as a rush to a decision
- They wanted to challenge underlying assumptions about growth
- They wanted to understand the process in language and with examples that was more straightforward. They remain unclear.
- They would like policy tailored to specific neighborhoods
- They would like a moratorium on issuing any new permits until there's a better plan
- They want better and timely communication
- They want to better understand how people get on committees; how decisions are made
- They acknowledged that setting good policy takes time
- They want more say in things, but are not sure what to recommend (other than neighborhoods)
- They want help in discerning what are facts and what are not facts

### What I noticed

- Most participants engaged in the process even though many of them expressed disappointment that the format had changed
- All small groups were engaged in conversation with each other – some venting, some off topic, and many working hard to deliver good feedback. Regardless of the content of what they were talking about, they were engaged with each other.
- The tone of the room was respectful. My assumption is that people were trying to self-manage their emotions and reactions and stay engaged.
- During the fishbowl, the Council actively listened and effectively demonstrated that they heard and understood what residents were saying.
- During fishbowl, residents were on topic, passionate, respectful, and clear in their comments. For the most part, they and Council followed the process.

### Some inferences/assumptions

- Residents want to collaborate with the town in more meaningful and substantive ways.
- Town Council is working hard and wants to make decisions for the good of all.
- Communication is fragmented and incomplete. Both sides are operating from biased perspectives and entrenched mindsets.

- The current processes and mechanisms for developing policy and engaging residents is no longer effective. They don't enable co-creating innovative solutions to the sticky problems the community faces.
- Council processes are not designed for the group as a whole to do their best work.
- To regain trust, credibility, and goodwill, and to encourage continued involvement, the Council needs to make a **bold** move based on the feedback. Something that is real, substantive, not the status quo, and that visibly demonstrates you're listening and taking action.

Some design thoughts:

- The presentation was less effective than it could be because folks felt like they were "drinking from a fire hose" (my words) and couldn't follow it
- Poll was less effective than it could be because residents were not going along with the assumptions embedded in the questions.
- Eliciting written feedback on the forum process didn't work at all. On the side, individuals shared positive feedback; in the whole group, the feedback was mostly critical.
- The space was adequate but less than ideal – difficult to move around; lighting quite low; some groups were unable to use the easels because not stable to write on;
- Fishbowl worked well; would be improved with physical space enhanced
- Went too late; folks tired.
- Would be strengthened with at least (3) facilitators for this large group