

REDMOND 2050 STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS AND DISCUSSIONS

Summary (updated April 13, 2021)

Discussion Purpose and Objectives

Background

The City is conducting its periodic update of the Redmond Comprehensive Plan—Redmond 2050. The Comprehensive Plan—which is legally required of every city and county in Washington—is the guiding document for how Redmond should plan for the next few decades. Planning for growth helps to build a city that meets the needs of the community. Redmond 2050 builds on the progress our city has made and—with public input—will guide our city’s growth.

The first tasks of Redmond 2050 include a community visioning process about where and how we should concentrate expected population and job growth. Redmond is considering two potential growth scenarios: concentrating growth in Downtown Redmond and Overlake, near future light rail stations (the “Centers” scenario), or spreading some of the growth to Redmond’s arterials (the “Centers + Corridors” scenario).

Starting in October 2020, the City has been hosting multiple online interactive activities—including an online community workshop—to gather input from Redmond community members and other stakeholders that will inform the vision. The City has been tracking the demographics of participants in these activities and observed that there are some gaps in participation among some key stakeholders, including youth, people who identify as minority, have low- to moderate household incomes, or live with disabilities.

Recognizing that different stakeholder groups have different engagement needs and the COVID-19 pandemic limits both people’s bandwidth to participate in public engagement and the City’s ability to provide meaningful public engagement opportunities, the City facilitated a series of interviews with leaders from community-based organizations that serve Redmond’s communities of color, individuals and families with low- to moderate-incomes, and people living with disabilities. In addition, the City met with the Redmond Youth Partnership Advisory Committee (RYPAC), a diverse group of youth who live in Redmond and voluntarily provide their time and insight to advise City of Redmond staff and elected officials on youth-related issues.

Goals and Objectives

Our goal for these interviews and discussion is to gather input from community-based organizations and youth to inform decisions about where to locate future job and population growth in Redmond. Specific objectives include:

- 1) Understand the potential benefits and adverse impacts of different growth scenarios on Redmond’s communities of color, residents with low incomes, people living with disabilities, young people, and Redmond’s overall diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- 2) Discuss with community-based organizations and other stakeholders the different benefits and tradeoffs of concentrating or dispersing growth for the people they serve or represent, and understand their perspectives on the relative importance of these benefits and tradeoffs to the people they serve.
- 3) Address current gaps in outreach for Redmond 2050.

Interview and Discussion Format

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions, a consultant for the City of Redmond conducted the interviews and discussion virtually. Each interview took approximately 45 minutes. We recorded them to ensure accurate note taking, but we are not sharing the recordings with the public. The discussion with the Redmond Youth Partnership Advisory Committee lasted 25 minutes, and approximately 20 students ages 14-18 participated.

Who Participated?

In addition to meeting with the RYPAC, the City of Redmond conducted interviews with the following organizations:

- Robert Blumenfeld, Associate Director Alliance for People with disAbilities
- Doug Emory, Dean of Instruction and Karen Lee, Director/Professor of Basic Education for Adults, Lake Washington Technical College Basic Education Services
- Angela Hinojos, Executive Director, Centro Cultural Mexicano
- Adam Pollard, Site Manager, Redmond Health Center (Healthpoint)
- Nickhath Sheriff, Founder/CEO, Muslim Community Resource Center
- Robin Tatsuda, Executive Director, The Arc of King County
- Lalita Uppala, Executive Director, Indian-American Community Services

Interview and Discussion Outcomes and Key Themes

Aspirations for and Concerns about the Future

We asked interview participants and the RYPAC to imagine that it is 2050 and Redmond has grown in population and jobs. Considering the needs and interests of the populations their organizations serve, we asked interview participants and RYPAC members to share their aspirations for and concerns about the future in Redmond. The following sub-sections describe what we heard from them:

Diversity, Inclusion, and Anti-Racism

Interview participants celebrate Redmond's growing diversity, and three praised the City's efforts to improve equity and inclusion.

That said, two interview participants indicated that communities of color in Redmond feel "invisible," even as their numbers grow. One interview participant observed that in places like Redmond where the median income is high, it is easy for many residents to have "blindness" to the social impacts of the pandemic, homelessness, limited English proficiency, and poverty on their neighbors. One interview participant expressed concern that even as Redmond grows more diverse, newcomers bring their own prejudices and forms of racism and colorism with them, adding that anti-racism efforts will need to adapt to adequately address what amounts to a moving target.

Interview and discussion participants aspire to see Redmond continue to advance anti-racism in government and out in the community. RYPAC members and interview participants want to see Redmond's communities of color have more of a presence in all levels of government and local decision-making, and more visibility to other Redmond residents through visual and performing arts. The RYPAC added an interest in seeing more gender as well as cultural diversity in leadership positions. Interview participants want to see **community planning and programming that brings different groups together and avoids insularity and siloes.**

Housing Opportunities for All

Almost universally, interview participants expressed concern about Redmond's high housing costs. They shared fears that their clients, constituents, and employees—even those with incomes that would be considered relatively high in other parts of Washington—are already priced out of Redmond's housing market. RYPAC members echoed these concerns.

The common refrain was that if most of the forecasted job and population growth is fueled by the tech industry, housing prices will remain well beyond the reach for people working in other sectors, such as service, education, and public service. Interview participants and RYPAC members fear that the Redmond of the future will be economically homogenous, even if it manages to retain some ethnic and linguistic diversity.

Interview participants shared the potential consequences of this development: people who work in Redmond's schools, restaurants, grocery stores, and fire department will need to travel from very far away to get to their jobs, placing great burden on Redmond's workers and their families and exacerbating already bad traffic congestion. On the other hand, several interview participants indicated that many of their clients and constituents who work in Redmond also want to live here, because it is important to them to invest in their community long term.

Both interview participants serving individuals with disabilities shared concerns about housing affordability for people with disabilities. One interview participant indicated that many people with disabilities rely on Social Security as their primary source of income, even if they are working. On average, households relying on Social Security for income are at 15% of median

income for King County and much lower for Redmond. Consequently, high housing costs are a significant barrier for people with disabilities to live in Redmond.

Interview participants and RYPAC members felt that finding new and innovative ways to **increase housing stock for households with low- to moderate incomes, especially families and multi-generational households** should be a priority as Redmond plans for the future.

Two interview participants shared detailed concerns about housing access for people with disabilities. In addition to meeting federal, state, and local accessibility requirements, many people with disabilities need to live in housing that has few shared walls (particularly for people with intellectual disabilities who may exhibit behavior that is different from what is generally considered “normal”), is close to transit, and is far from high-speed arterials and other potential safety hazards. This can be a tall order, especially because—as one interview participant explained—current local, state, and federal policies and regulations do not adequately address the mobility access, housing, and transportation needs of people with disabilities. Furthermore, because people with disabilities are more likely to face economic challenges than other community members, finding mobility-accessible housing that is affordable is nearly impossible in Redmond. Given the limited land available for development and the pressure the City is under to add a lot of housing over the next thirty years, one interview participant expressed pessimism that the City will be able to implement plans and policies that will help meet the housing needs of people living with disabilities.

Sustaining Redmond’s Small Businesses

Multiple interview participants discussed the importance of Redmond’s small and independent business community to its character, adding that small businesses employ a lot of their clients and constituents. RYPAC members echoed the importance of Redmond’s small businesses. They expressed concern that Redmond’s growth—if too focused on the expansion of large corporations and the tech industry—could edge out these smaller businesses. RYPAC members cited the loss of Frankie’s Italian Restaurant—a popular neighborhood gathering place with “to die for Italian Wedding Soup” as an indicator that beloved small businesses are at risk.

One interview participant lauded Redmond’s current approach to supporting small business recruiting and retention, indicating they aspire to a future **where Redmond continues to grow and sustain its small business-friendly culture.**

Access to Sustaining Jobs

Similarly, interview participants discussed the importance of access to jobs that provide sustaining wages. They explained that many of Redmond’s residents who were born outside the U.S. arrive with advanced education and degrees, but because of limited English language skills or other barriers are unable to access jobs with family-sustaining wages. They want to see a future Redmond with a **greater variety of sustaining-wage jobs.**

Cultural Spaces and Community Gathering Places

A few interview participants indicated that their clients and constituents love Redmond for its green space and safe and accessible parks. Several RYPAC members echoed this, adding an appreciation for Redmond's multiuse trails and connections to the regional trail network. They aspire to a future where **open spaces and parks are retained and expanded**.

A few interview participants also described the power of performing arts and cultural activities in building community, elevating the visibility of Redmond's cultural communities to other residents, and connecting people in need to services and supports. One interview participant shared data from a community survey indicating that community members have a strong desire for culturally-relevant programming.

One interview participant talked about the transition toward more accessible and/or sensory-friendly playgrounds for children with intellectual and physical disabilities. They hope Redmond considers some of these innovations as it grows and improves/expands parks.

Interview participants and some RYPAC members aspire to see **more community gathering places**—including soccer fields (which are of particular importance to Redmond's Latinx communities), **community centers**, indoor and outdoor **cultural spaces to showcase performing and visual arts**, and **programming to highlight Redmond's cultural communities**. RYPAC members expressed a desire to see **art in public spaces that celebrates Redmond's cultural communities and honors the tribal lands upon which Redmond sits**.

They added that it is important that community gathering spaces and places be accessible to all in terms of proximity to where people live and transportation access.

Non-Single Occupant Vehicle Transportation

Interview participants and the RYPAC generally hope that Redmond will be a place where **people can access jobs, school, housing, and amenities without having to use a car**. Interview participants shared that Redmond's pre-pandemic traffic had substantial impact on their clients, constituents, and employees and expressed fear that it would only worsen with growth. One interview participant added that this is especially true for people with disabilities, many of whom do not use a car.

This interview participant added that there are some creative solutions that have worked well in other communities. For example, a free circulator bus in Issaquah is popular with people with disabilities because it is an easy and no cost way to access community and amenities. Another example is a King County Metro Transit program that trains people with disabilities who are able to use fixed-route transit instead of paratransit. This approach has been successful in improving mobility for people with disabilities.

RYPAC members echoed the desire for more transportation options—especially for many young people who do not have their driver's license. They suggested adding more bus stops to bring

people from their homes to light rail and continuing to make Redmond streets bicycle- and pedestrian-friendly.

Two interview participants expressed pessimism that housing affordability is possible in Redmond's future, suggesting that Redmond should instead focus on ensuring that there is adequate transit to bring people from outside the area to jobs and services in Redmond.

Affordable and Quality Childcare

One interview participant raised a concern about the limited availability of affordable, quality childcare in Redmond. They indicated that post-pandemic economic recovery necessitates access to child care, or parents may not be able to return to work. They aspire to a future Redmond where **housing, transit, child care, and schools are proximate to each other**.

Safety and Walkability/Bike-ability

RYPAC members shared that they feel **safe walking or bicycling in Redmond**, and aspire to a future Redmond where this is maintained and enhanced.

Environmental Sustainability

RYPAC members spoke of the importance of moving toward **more environmental sustainability**, including initiatives to plant more trees, reduce dependency on cars, and encourage more renewable energy use.

Other Concerns and Aspirations

Interview and discussion participants highlighted a few additional concerns and aspirations worth noting:

- Two interview participants discussed the importance of providing Redmond residents with access to higher education, workforce development, and English as a Second Language and resources. They suggested re-introducing a storefront branch of Lake Washington Technical College or another higher education provider to Downtown Redmond and/or the Overlake neighborhood.
- Two interview participants mentioned that Redmond needs more affordable and culturally-relevant grocery stores, indicating that a number of their clients and constituents travel to South Seattle and South King County to grocery shop.
- At least three interview participants raised concerns about Redmond's growing homeless population and the plan to address homelessness.
- RYPAC members discussed some of the challenges that youth face, including pressure at school and the need to learn decision-making skills that will help them become independent. They aspire to see community and school programming and a cultural shift toward supporting young people.
- RYPAC members and one interview participant wondered how Redmond schools plans to accommodate growth. The interview participant was especially concerned about ensuring that students with disabilities are still able to receive the services they need as

population increases. They mentioned a program to help young adults with disabilities transition to independence and indicated a desire for programs like this one to continue, even as schools grow and have to serve more students.

- RYPAC members mentioned that they love Redmond for its physical beauty and views of trees, mountains, and water. They expressed a desire to see more variety in architecture in Downtown and Overlake, multi-use buildings where housing and commercial spaces are co-located, and buildings that are not so tall that they block out views, indicating that they fear Redmond becoming a “concrete jungle.”

Benefits and Impacts of Growth Scenarios on Key Populations

The next set of questions asked interview participants to consider the two potential scenarios for accommodating future growth in Redmond and provide their feedback on how these scenarios may benefit or impact the communities their organizations serve.¹ Generally speaking, interview participants did not draw strong conclusions as to which scenario would be preferable for the communities they serve. That said, they offered feedback on the potential benefits and impacts of each scenario that could inform Redmond’s decision-making. The following sub-sections describe this feedback.

Affordable Housing

Building on the aspirations and concerns about housing for all in the future, interview participants urged Redmond to **choose the scenario that offers the best opportunity to increase affordable housing for families.**

One interview participant explained that some members of Redmond’s Latinx community lived in the same apartment complexes as relatives. They shared that some members of Redmond’s Latinx community have experienced discomfort or harassment living in neighborhoods where there are few others who look like them, which may motivate them to live in places where there are other Latinx people. They added that there are also benefits to being proximate to relatives and close friends in terms of child care and social needs. They indicated that the **concentrated growth scenario might create more multi-family housing where people from the same families and/or cultural communities could live near each other.**

On the other hand, another interview participant acknowledged that **many families want to have a little outdoor space and mused that it would be good to have more housing choices,** potentially supporting the dispersed growth scenario.

Access to Amenities and Services

Interview participants discussed the importance of access to child care, school, transit, parks, and other public and community services. Some wondered if **the concentrated growth scenario would provide the housing density needed to facilitate access to these amenities and services.**

¹ Given time limitations and relevance, we did not ask these questions of the RYPAC.

Business and Job Diversity

An interview participant raised concerns that the concentrated growth scenario could lead to increased rents and competition for commercial space in downtown Redmond and Overlake, further edging out already vulnerable small and independent businesses. They want to see **any growth scenario accompanied by polices and plans to retain small businesses**, such as rent stabilization.

Priorities

The next set of questions laid out some potential tradeoffs for each of the growth scenarios and asked interview participants to prioritize, based on the needs and interests of the people they serve.

Housing Diversity vs. Traffic

By placing more housing and jobs in proximity to light rail, the concentrated growth scenario may have a greater impact on traffic congestion. On the other hand, the dispersed growth scenario may allow for more housing diversity, such as accessory dwelling units.

Most interview participants felt that Redmond's pre-pandemic traffic conditions had a detrimental effect on their employees, clients, and constituents and advocated for whichever growth scenario would go the farthest in addressing traffic congestion. Housing diversity appeared to be a lower priority for most interview participants. That said, given the specific housing needs of people with disabilities—such as access to transit, distance from high-speed roadways and other potential safety hazards, few shared walls, accessibility for wheelchairs, etc.—housing diversity may be a higher priority for people with disabilities.

Job Access vs. Job Diversity

Concentrating jobs near light rail stations in Overlake and Redmond would improve access to jobs, but it could also mean some types of jobs would have to relocate outside of Redmond.

This one tended to be a toss-up: interview participants felt that both access to jobs and job diversity are high priorities for the communities they serve. One interview participant indicated that for people with disabilities, transit accessibility was probably more important than job diversity.

Access to Amenities vs. Retaining Neighborhood Character

Locating neighborhood centers outside of Downtown and Overlake would mean that more Redmond residents would be able to walk to shops, restaurants, and other amenities, but it would also change the character of Redmond's single-family neighborhoods.

Interview participants generally felt that access to amenities such as transit, parks, community center, public services, schools, and child care is a high priority. Retaining the single-family character of Redmond's neighborhoods was not a priority for any of the interview participants.

One interview participant that communal spaces need to be accessible, but also welcoming to people with disabilities. That means setting up entrances and physical spaces to accommodate wheelchairs and people with sight impairments, understanding that behavior that differs from the norm is not deviant or intentionally disruptive, and making people feel welcome, even if they are behaving in a way that is different from typical public behavior.

Ongoing Engagement

At the conclusion of the interview, we explained that the City of Redmond will be seeking additional input from community members to inform decisions about how growth looks. We asked how best to engage their clients and constituents in the future.

Interview participants generally agreed with holding meetings and small group discussions with community-based organizations that serve Redmond, given the impacts of the pandemic on public engagement. That said, they offered a number of suggestions for directly engaging the communities they serve:

- Compensate people for their time, either with a stipend or something of value to them. For example, Centro Cultural Mexicano offers toys and piñatas in exchange for completing a survey. Indian American Community Services offers a Starbucks gift card or tea variety box in exchange for participating in community outreach.
- When it is safe to do so, attach an outreach effort to a free cultural performance, fair, or festival. For example, Centro Cultural Mexicano paired outreach about the 2020 Census with a Mariachi performance.
- Indian American Community Services offers “community cafés,” which are discussion groups centered around a topic. They would be willing to do a community café on Redmond’s behalf, and suggest that Redmond consider providing funds for them to offer participants a nominal incentive.
- Muslim Community Resource Center invited Redmond officials to attend a gathering of community members—when it is safe to do so in person—to share information and ask for input. They offered to help connect City of Redmond staff with constituents and clients in other ways, too.
- Both interview participants serving people with disabilities suggest finding ways to consult with people with disabilities directly whenever possible. This may mean forming advisory committees and seeking opportunities to apply a “disability lens” to every policy or program.

Takeaways

Although there was no consensus around either growth scenario, we formed some key takeaways:

- Across the board, interview participants and RYPAC members cautioned the City of Redmond to avoid a scenario where growth of large corporations and the tech industry

results in economic and cultural homogeneity, a loss of small businesses, and the edging out of people living with disabilities.

- Neither growth scenario is a slam dunk for the priorities outlined by interview participants. Therefore, to address the priorities of the interview participants, any growth scenario will need to be accompanied by policies that encourage:
 - Affordability, both for housing and commercial space.
 - More community gathering places and cultural spaces that bring people together.
 - Access to transit.
 - Traffic mitigation.
- Addressing Redmond’s shortage of affordable and mobility-accessible housing for people living with disabilities is a tall order, but it needs to be done if Redmond wants to avoid pushing out its residents with disabilities.
- For Redmond’s different cultural and language communities, people with disabilities, and young people, it is important to sustain a culture that is welcoming and supportive of all people. Redmond’s residents want to be able to walk in their neighborhoods or visit communal spaces and feel safe, welcome, and supported. While Redmond is doing a relatively good job with sustaining a culture of inclusivity, this may be a challenge as Redmond grows.
- Young people value Redmond for its physical beauty, safety, walkability, and “homey” sense of community. They aspire to a future Redmond that manages to retain these characteristics, even as it grows.

Next Steps

We will use the feedback shared with us in the interviews and discussion with the RYPAC—along with feedback from the November 2020 Community Workshop, recent roundtable discussions with small businesses in Overlake, meeting with Eastside BIPOC business leaders, and recent online interactive engagement tools to finish developing the growth alternatives.

Once the City of Redmond has landed on a growth scenario, we will continue gathering input on what that growth should look like. We may reach out to the community-based organizations who participated in these interviews again, to report back on how their input was considered and addressed in decisions about growth scenarios and gather input on the form that future growth should take.

Appendix

1. Interview Guide