

Columbia Vision Commission's 5 Key Takeaways from the 2019 Strategic Plan Focus Group Report

As explained to the Vision Commission, this report was designed to seek feedback from specific demographics (including several marginalized groups) within the Columbia citizenry. Although the commission recognizes this report therefore inherently over-represents the thoughts, concerns, and suggestions of these specifically targeted individuals statistically, we also understand the importance of providing a platform to such voices. As such views held by participants in this focus group research do not necessarily align with the majority of the general population (per the 2018 citizen survey).

The Vision Commission has identified 5 key citizen concerns expressed in the focus groups that should guide and drive decision making during the next strategic planning process.

1) **Economic mobility:**

- QUOTE 1:
- QUOTE 2:

2) Housing: It's unclear to the commission whether housing concerns are a resources issue, an awareness issue, or just a general concern about the city's housing market costs/values.

- "Rent needs to be regulated and be more realistic for community members to afford their monthly payments. Affordable housing is really hard. Renting is outrageous." (Page 36)
- "Housing is higher for single bedroom units due to students. Quality of housing needs to improve. Too much slumlord mentality on the lower end." (Page 72)

3) City Communication/Leadership: Concerns about city leadership were likely skewed based on the city manager transition/disruption occurring during the time the focus groups took place.

- QUOTE 1:
- QUOTE 2:

4) Transit: Specific suggestions for improvement centered around longer hours and more route options.

- "A city of this size should have bus service from morning to night. Not having bus service is a major issue. Issues with equity." (Page 98)
- "Lack of concern (in the city government) around transit is a little bit scary; city keeps cutting it." Focus (Page 101)

5) Infrastructure: Infrastructure was a high-priority concern among the seniors and persons with disabilities. Specific suggestions for improvement included aging infrastructure, bike lanes, and crosswalks.

- "Bike paths are not as safe as they should be, needs improvement." (Page 143)
- "NE, off of Ballinger Road, has no lighting, cars coming towards you can't see you. No sidewalks. Cars speed through there." (Page 99)

**The Vision Commission would also like to note that public safety was a leading concern in the [2018 citizen survey](#) but that this sentiment was not a primary concern for those participating in this focus group.*

Actionable Goals for Strategic Planning

- 1) Be more accessible to community members and seek continued feedback from marginalized/under-represented citizens who feel their voices aren't heard. City leaders should hear what the community members have to say for themselves. Meaningful efforts by city leadership to reach out to those who feel disengaged/unheard can improve their perception of the city's commitment all citizens. This could look like increasing city leadership visibility at events or forums where they can get to know community members from diverse backgrounds at accessible locations in a variety of neighborhoods.
- 2) City leaders should integrate citizen feedback into their decision-making processes. The gesture of reaching out itself is not enough. Citizens targeted in this report do not feel listened to and were not entirely sure their voices would be heard even though they were specifically given this platform. That is to say that, they enjoyed the opportunity to provide open-ended feedback but were unsure if anything would actually change as a result. Take action that will solve serious problems within housing, public safety, transportation and infrastructure.
- 3) Although the citizens represented in this survey recognize that the Columbia economy thrives on a student population, they want city leadership to recognize that students are not the only ones in town who need access to affordable, safe housing options; students do not need expanded access to quality public transportation; and students are not the only ones who need to be taken into account when planning for the future of Columbia.