

June 2019 Lakewood Developer's Forum

Audience Comments

1. What are we doing well, that you would like to see more of?

Public Works Engineering

- Road and walkway improvements.
- Focus on improving transportations network.
- Road improvement in Steilacoom Park, Yes!
- Continue to maintain, improve, and repair local roads.
- Continue to add sidewalks and landscaping to existing roads.
- Using grants to best improve traffic and sidewalks.

Community and Economic Development

- Like the downtown plan and improvements in transportation.
- Downtown development.
- I'm excited to see that we're doing long range planning to develop a true "city". Having been in Lakewood for 35+ years it's great to see areas like the Colonial Center being uplifted.
- This meeting was very well thought out. Very informative with relevant information for business planning.
- Encouraging business and developers in Lakewood, and providing incentives.
- Flexibility with infill regulations and simplified permitting.
- Please continue to have sessions like today's developer's forum; very helpful.
- Organize additional opportunities to meet with leaders of permitting department, Building Official, etc...
- New business growth.
- Working with nonprofit homeownership organizations to develop affordable housing opportunities.

Community Safety Resource Team

- Condemnation of nuisance properties.

City Council and Executive Leadership Team / Parks and Recreation

- City events are good and well promoted.
- More family activities would rock.
- No impact and B&O.
- Incentives for more home ownership vs rental.
- Thoughtful consideration when spending our tax dollars.
- City gateway signs.
- Improvements to parks, and welcoming signs.
- Public spaces, and community gathering.

Audience feedback with primary department responsibility and responses

2. What are we doing that we shouldn't be doing?

Public Works Engineering

Comment: Traffic control – school zone cameras and long stop lights with little traffic.

Response: We are working on refining signal timing, and grants to upgrade some of the traffic signals.

Comment: Occasional poorly planned construction/improvements that block business, and detour multiple routes to isolate areas.

Response: We will do our best to improve upon this in the future and direct our contractors to be vigilant of the same.

Community and Economic Development

Comment: Building department seems to have a culture of “prove it to us” vs. how do we get to yes. This does not apply to planning or core staff where the effort and culture was positive.

Response: We have noted this as a concern. If there are specific situations where this occurs in the future please share this with our staff. We must adhere to the building code to ensure the safety of all.

Comment: Increase incentives for business and development.

Response: Here are some of the activities we engage in to support business and development

- Washington Economic Development Association [legislative agenda](#)
- Association of Washington Cities [legislative agenda](#)
- Support of the EDB Tacoma/Pierce County [Doing Business](#)
- Pierce County [Economic Development](#)
- New City of Lakewood [Family Wage Job Credit](#)
- HB 1406: [Affordable Housing Tax Credit](#) (no new tax to the consumer) Resolution
- Grants for infrastructure to support development and redevelopment

Comment: Putting high traffic impacts and other impact fees such as the one placed on the walking streets discourages development and many times creates an infeasible situation for project proposals.

Response: The traffic mitigation fee was established to fund the open space and infrastructure needs of the new Downtown Plan. City Council believed that this should be a 50% share between the City and the property owners as all will benefit from the improvements. We have no other impact fees in Lakewood. We have modified the mitigation fee to allow the new tenant to use the prior use of the building for the trip comparison, even if it has been vacant for many years. The trip mitigation fee runs with the property.

Comment: Restricting ADU's to existing homes square footage; All ADU's should be allowed to be 1,000 sf in all residential zones.

Response: Long range planning is working on an update to the code. We are reviewing this option in our analysis.

- Need for time spent on permitting assistance; Permitting in Lakewood is too complex.
- Making permitting a challenge

Response: We have completed or are working on the following

- Compared permitting to other cities for best practices
- Reviewing procedures to avoid duplication
- Many permits are not over-the-counter
- Separate inspectors for residential and commercial inspections
- New comprehensive checklists
- More training for permit technicians
- Updated 18.A to include easy-to-use land-use tables and updated language
- Met with retailers and other businesses to get input
- Going to all electronic submittals
- Will transfers permit system to PALS (Pierce County System)
- Hired an assistant dedicated to the permit counter to assist clients

Comment: Making it harder for landlords in anyway.

Response: The Rental Housing Safety Program was established so that all rental units have minimum standards to ensure the health and safety of all residents. [Visit the website](#) for more information. Rental properties must be registered in the City. We do not add any additional taxes or to rental properties.

Comment: Granting any waivers for group homes with sexual predators in the Oakbrook area.

Response: The City does not grant waivers. This is through the Department of Social and Health Services. The City has been in litigation over this issue and we continue to fight for the health and safety of all residents.

Comment: Bar Department of Corrections from using Lakewood as a dumping ground for felons from the prison system.

Response: We requested that Corrections not drop off felons in Lakewood. Our request was denied.

Other

Comment: Nothing that I know of – I’m a newer business owner in Springbrook and the future looks very bright.

Response: Thank you! Please reach out if you need assistance.

3. What else should we be doing?

Public Works Engineering

Comment: Evaluate existing stoplights for coordination of timing to alleviate long backups; Addition of left turn arrow lights on dangerous intersections; more roundabouts!

Response: We do have plans for additional roundabouts and the left turn arrow for intersections. We are evaluating and adjusting signal timing. Additional grants will help in replacing outdated signals.

Comment: Much more street maintenance and repair.

Response: [Visit our website](#) for Capital projects, and for more information on maintenance and repair. If you see an issue related to roads, please report this on www.mylakewood311.com.

Community and Economic Development

Comment: New program, Partner with Homeownership Center to facilitate life/safety improvements for low to moderate income homeowners; City offers loan/grant for improvements/code violations; Keeps homeowners in their home and improves property value.

Response: The City has started initial conversations with a local financial institution to establish a low interest home rehabilitation loan program. We have also reached out to the Homeownership Center to identify opportunities for such a program. Here are a couple [of links](#) to [local resources](#), and the HUD [Homeownership Center](#) representing Washington state.

Comment: Need for good paying jobs for locals.

Response: We work closely with Pierce County and The EDB Tacoma/Pierce County on both retention and expansion of local businesses, and recruitment of companies that are good fit for our community. We are focused on creating family wage jobs and have adopted a family wage job credit to apply towards any permitting fees with the City of Lakewood. Industrial, manufacturing, health care, professional services (including IT), and skilled trade jobs are all a high priority for us.

Comment: The City says that it's small business friendly but that's not my experience, particularly in the permit process and having information easily accessible on the web page. For example, do I need a permit for a roof overlay on a duplex? Permit counter gives an answer, then inspector gives a different answer. So, if your employees don't know, that's just the problem.

Response: We are committed to streamlining permit services. Please see the information above.

Comment: Maybe email quarterly updates on developments.

Response: Lakewood Index, an economic development newsletter will now be published quarterly. Please contact Becky Newton, bnewton@cityoflakewood if you would like to be added to the list.

Comment: More grassroots community involvement.

Response: Typically grassroots efforts are not what governments get involved in due to the political nature of these movements. Community members may engage and form a grassroots effort. The City has advisory groups to help guide us in various . If there is another idea you would like to share with us please let us know.

Comment: Make Seeley Lake an actual lake/park, family safe, visually pleasing hangout (see Green lake Seattle – Nesting Island, etc.).

Response: This lake is owned by Pierce County but the City Parks Department is working with Pierce County Parks on potential future improvements.

Comment: Spend greater effort on tapping into local businesses, developer's and investors to keep money and business in Lakewood; We still see the city reaching outside the community to get development support when there are enormous resources in the community.

Response: The City visits with 80+ local businesses each year. We have also established an annual business retention and expansion survey. Sign up for Lakewood Index to ensure notification of the survey. The market determines national and regional tenant placement.

Comment: PALS & electronic – online permitting

Response: This is in the works.

Comment: Drive more single family homeownership vs rentals; we are already at 50% rentals; this creates a transient city with shallow roots.

Response: The City continually looks for areas on a yearly basis at areas we can up-zone to allow for more single family residential properties. Our dangerous building abatement and nuisance property abatement programs are increasing to help make more properties livable. We are reaching out to single family developers for middle market product.

Comment: Make sure that Lakewood isn't a dumping ground for the state DSHS and DOC.

Response: This is noted above.

Comment: Reduce and simplify the rental housing inspection complexity.

Response: This is a fairly new program that we are continually improving. Here is a link to [frequently asked questions](#) and [program details](#).

Comment: Make it easy for investors, business owners to connect with the City; it is very hard to get a meeting with the right people.

Response: Here are some helpful links to [Community and Economic Development Staff](#), the [Public Works Engineering Director](#), and the [City Manager](#).

Comment: Simplify process and costs for developers and landlords.

Response: This is noted above.

4. If you were "King for a day" what would you like to see in Lakewood?

Public Works Engineering

Comment: More infrastructure improvements.

Response: Ongoing and continual improvements. Visit our [Public Works Engineering page](#) to learn more.

Comment: Repave Gravelly Lake from the freeway to town.

Response: In 2020, Public Works Engineering will be initiating the design on the Nyanza to Washington Boulevard project. The third leg, from Nyanza to Gravelly Lake Drive has yet to be funded and the City will be applying for eligible grant funds as they come available.

Community and Economic Development

Comment: Establish receivership of defunct properties and homes with homeownership center to be developed as affordable homes for ownership, not rentals.

Response: We are working with Habitat for Humanity, and utilize Home Funds and other federal programs for the re-use of defunct properties. We have noted that a homeownership center would be a valuable asset. This will be discussed as a part of our housing strategic plan.

Comment: Address solution to the issue of homeless we see on the streets.

Response: The City is heavily involved with a Pierce County task force to address the homeless situation. We set aside 1% of our general fund to assist non-profit organizations in providing assistance. We have a dedicated human services staff member.

Comment: Institute tools and education for permit desk folks; Increase people that can approve permits; Once permit has been looked at once no new issues should arise.

Response: We have ramped up training for permit technicians and planning staff. We have hired a permit coordinator and an additional front desk assistant. Continual improvement is ongoing for online submittals, transparency, and

Comment: If structural engineer stamp should need review that can be done by perhaps a building inspector. This frees up time for plans examiner to look at first plans. With plans examiner being hard to find I'd look across the state, county for people that can do work online. This would be great to do when accepting PALS system.

Response: Thank you for this suggestion. We will consider this as we refine our processes.

I would like to see a senior housing project, rental and ownership.

Response: We have worked with a number of senior housing builders to identify land, and to assist in making their projects pencil. So far we've not had a project, but there is definitely a huge need in this market.

I want to see an indoor swap meet with well screened vendors, weekends or quarterly.

Response: Noted. Thank you for the suggestion.

I want to see church buildings utilized for mental health classes or anything related to mental health.

Response: Some churches do have these services. Our human services coordinator is aware of this need and is continually speaking with churches and other non-profit organizations to connect resources and fill this need.

Water feature; Splash pad like Ruston Point.

Response: We have talked about this. It has come before City Council and is something we would like to do, but we're not sure where. A local Rotary has an interest in assisting.

Increase density in all residential areas to allow for more duplex/fourplex and ADU concepts. Smaller lot requirements/standards; increased cottage housing density.

Response: We have increased density in some areas. We continually look at this. There is a public process we must go through to change density and sometimes it comes with opposition.

Lowest permit fees in the county.

Response: We are working on have the best permit department in the state by using smart goals, continually improving services, involving our entire team and, getting input from clients.

Batting cages for kids here in Lakewood.

Response: We've proposed this to our Parks & Recreation department.

New home for Cascade Bagel Shop.

Response: We have worked with the new owners of the building to accommodate the Bagel shop, and to provide needed upgrades to the current building so that they may operate in an adequate facility until such time that the business can decide what they would like to do. We provide assistance to find a new location should the Bagel Shop decide they wish to relocate.

Affordable housing increase for purchase, not rental.

Response: Housing affordability is dependent upon market forces. One way we can help is to rezone property to higher density which allows for more units and therefore, lower costs.

City employees living in Lakewood so they live what is being implemented.

Response: Noted. We do require the City Manager to live in Lakewood. Many of the staff members do live here but it is not required.

A Metro Market at the old QFC site in the Colonial Center.

Response: We have communicated this to the new owners. Thank you for the suggestion.

A high end grocery store, Metropolitan Market, Lucky's Market (Colorado grocery chain) or similar upscale grocery in the old QFC space.

Response: We are working on that.

Deregulate and allow for more market efficiency.

Response: We do not regulate business operations, other than ensuring that they are safe. We do not place added regulations at the local level. This is primarily state and federal and we advocate for this through the legislative process.

Hire more people in the permitting department, plan review and process is too slow.

Response: We hired a new employee for the permit counter.

Corporate headquarters focus.

Response: We agree and continue to reach out to companies that are a good fit, have primary and family wage jobs, and are willing to locate their headquarters to Lakewood.

Effort to provide affordable housing for all ages, especially seniors; demonstration projects; more cottage communities.

Response: We have a cottage housing ordinance and are encouraging all of these uses. We have passed an ordinance for HB 1406 which allows us to get taxes collected back from the state (no additional cost to the consumer). These funds are to be used for affordable housing. We have a multifamily tax exemption program that includes a 12-year exemption if projects include at least 20% affordable housing. We support the extension of the 12-year exemption to 16 years which will be coming forward in the next legislative session.