

Your Voice Ohio: Vibrant Columbus

Exploring how to make
Columbus a thriving
community for all

September 25, 2018



A lot has changed about Ohio's economy over the last 20 years. There are nearly 152,000 fewer jobs, there's a lower average household income and higher student debt, and the state is falling behind in education. For the first time in at least a half century, Ohio did not recover from one recession before it entered the next recession. Complicating matters, the correlation between economic struggle and the addiction crisis, which is claiming lives and sucking financial vibrancy from families, communities and the state, has become clear.

But many people don't need to read these statements to tell them what's going on. We see it in our neighborhoods, from vacant blocks to payday lenders to shuttered factories.

While many Ohioans are facing a dwindling community population, jobs loss, and wage stagnation, Columbus residents are part of a different story. Home to many state government employees and Ohio State University, Columbus is one of the fastest growing cities in the nation, and job opportunities and income continue to grow. Residents see parks, markets, housing, a well educated workforce, and young and growing population as community assets. To build on what's already working in Columbus, local journalists teamed up and talked to community members at Your Voice Ohio: Vibrant Columbus.

On Tuesday, September 25, 2018, at the Boat House Restaurant in Columbus, residents met with members of the media to explore what Columbus would like it if it was thriving for everyone in the community.

The word "economy" can be intimidating to many because it means different things, including jobs, the overall economy, debt, poverty, income inequality, trade, and perhaps even the cost of health care. This can make it difficult for community members to easily find and provide information about what they're experiencing.

Our goal, through these community conversations, is to put people at the center of local reporting. Our collaborative aims to supply people with the information and resources they need to create smart, shared, and sustainable solutions to the struggles facing folks across Ohio.

EVENT SUMMARY

On September 25, 2018, community members gathered at the Boat House Restaurant in Columbus, and over the course of 2 hours, discussed their experiences and identified local economic solutions.

We asked these four questions to prompt the discussion:

- 1. What would Columbus look like if it was thriving for everyone in the community?**
- 2. What's one thing you would improve or change in Columbus to make it more vibrant?**
- 3. What assets, resources, and strengths exist in Columbus?**
- 4. What actions might we take to make Columbus more vibrant?**

The conversation generated important questions for the local media to explore. In the following pages, you'll find stories and ideas shared by participants during the event.



RESPONSES

WHAT WOULD COLUMBUS LOOK LIKE IF IT WAS THRIVING FOR EVERYONE IN THE COMMUNITY?

- » No cultural disconnect between places in the community on who feels connected to economic development and who doesn't. Bridges across divides.
- » Small and large businesses employing residents.
- » Vibrant neighborhoods with identity.
- » Clean and efficient public transportation.
- » Feeling of hope and opportunity. No work anxiety.
- » Strong social service network.
- » Schools would perform uniformly well.
- » Fewer food pantries would be needed.
- » Less automobile and more pedestrian traffic in all areas of the city, 16hrs/days interacting warmly and safely.
- » Ethnic diversity, economic diversity, integration!
- » Built/man-made, experiential, educational opportunity observation deck (Rhodes).
- » People would have good jobs, quality schools, and access to arts. Good jobs = pays a livable wage.
- » Everyone that wanted to work had a sustaining job.
- » Full employment, that is the ability to afford basic needs and to enjoy the fruits of one's labors. Food, shelter, healthcare, education, transportation, entertainment.
- » Safe and affordable housing in all areas of the city.
- » No sub-sections of the City that were neglected with dilapidated structures.
- » People didn't go to bed hungry and homeless.
- » People employed at living wage jobs.
- » Paying attention to the people nobody things need our attention (homeless, drug addicts, mental health).
- » Continued small business growth and support for small business.
- » Less poverty.
- » Education.
- » More people reach work.
- » More and better jobs.
- » Equal chances for success for everyone.
- » More income equality.
- » Fewer people working 2-3 jobs to make ends meet and a big reduction in poverty.

- » There would still be fancier and less fancy neighborhoods, but all areas would be clean, safe, have access to work and education, and hope.
- » All income levels to be made a part of Columbus, instead of being left out.
- » City officials to be held accountable.
- » Full employment.
- » Wages moving up.
- » Housing at different price points.
- » Safe and good schools.
- » All citizens would be proud to take a variety of public transportation options regularly into downtown Columbus to SHOP AFFORDABLY, EAT + DRINK AFFORDABLY, and feel the vitality of a successful urban environment.
- » People would have a living wage jobs.
- » Infant mortality would be low.
- » Schools are successful, with graduates prepared.
- » Thriving arts community.
- » Clean air and water.
- » Affordable housing.
- » Safe, walkable neighborhoods.



WHAT'S ONE THING YOU WOULD IMPROVE OR CHANGE IN COLUMBUS TO MAKE IT MORE VIBRANT?

- » Limit refugee time for assistance
- » Restore neighborhoods
- » Help veterans more
- » Clean up neighborhoods
- » Better access to mental health and addiction treatment
- » Possible syringe program/clean needles
- » More community engagement/understanding
- » Treatment courts
- » Allow people to feel useful
- » Take the focus off bringing in something (businesses, tech, sports teams, rich people, tourists) from outside and instead promote, heal, encourage, invest in the people and businesses here.
- » Reduced criminal mentality of troubled youth.
- » Access to training/education for everyone to get good jobs.
- » Employers recognizing a community role, not just an economic role
- » Increase worker skill level to improve earnings
- » Create living wage jobs with benefits for security
- » Assuming Columbus is not much different than the rest of Ohio: 1) Change people's attitude that taxes are a bad thing, and 2) Install an election system that is totally public funded and with shorter election cycles so as to eliminate situations like White Hat. It's about how it's spend not how it's taken in.
- » MUCH better public transportation, all modes.
- » More small + large parks and public gathering areas.
- » All tall structure to look out over the city or existing buildings
- » Minimize sprawl of young and middle age family residents by providing a holistic urban strategy that attracts and sustains young families within Columbus city limits. FOR EXAMPLE, publicly identifying neighborhoods and blending them with the attractions of great schools, libraries, and parks.
- » More jobs that pay a livable wage.
- » More affordable and good quality housing.
- » More integrated neighborhoods --both economic and ethnic.
- » Attract more well-paying jobs: Amazon HQ2. Job training to match employer needs. Take advantage of our assets: location, energy, water.
- » More collaboration between human service agencies/organizations to fill gaps and to leverage limited business resources (tear down silos).
- » Lessen apathy toward the impoverished and those with less or limited resources.

- » Improve transportation options.
- » Increase minimum wage to \$15/hr.
- » Change hiring practices for restored citizens.
- » Create more 24hr childcare.
- » Increase opportunities.
- » Available housing and affordable.
- » Jobs, including low-paying.
- » Education to bring us into 21st century
- » Better schools.
- » More attractive to outside corporations and residents.
- » Lower taxes.
- » Less regulations.
- » Streamline government → privatize where possible.
- » More living-wage jobs at the lower end of the wage scale.
- » Ensure that low-income residents are included when neighborhoods are improved.
- » Invest in housing code enforcement to maintain and improve living conditions and reduce crime.
- » Build a better transportation system, especially “last-mile” to work.
- » Raise the minimum wage.
- » Improve access to early childhood education.
- » Life coaching and job training.



WHAT ASSETS, RESOURCES, AND STRENGTHS EXIST IN COLUMBUS?

Individuals wrote...

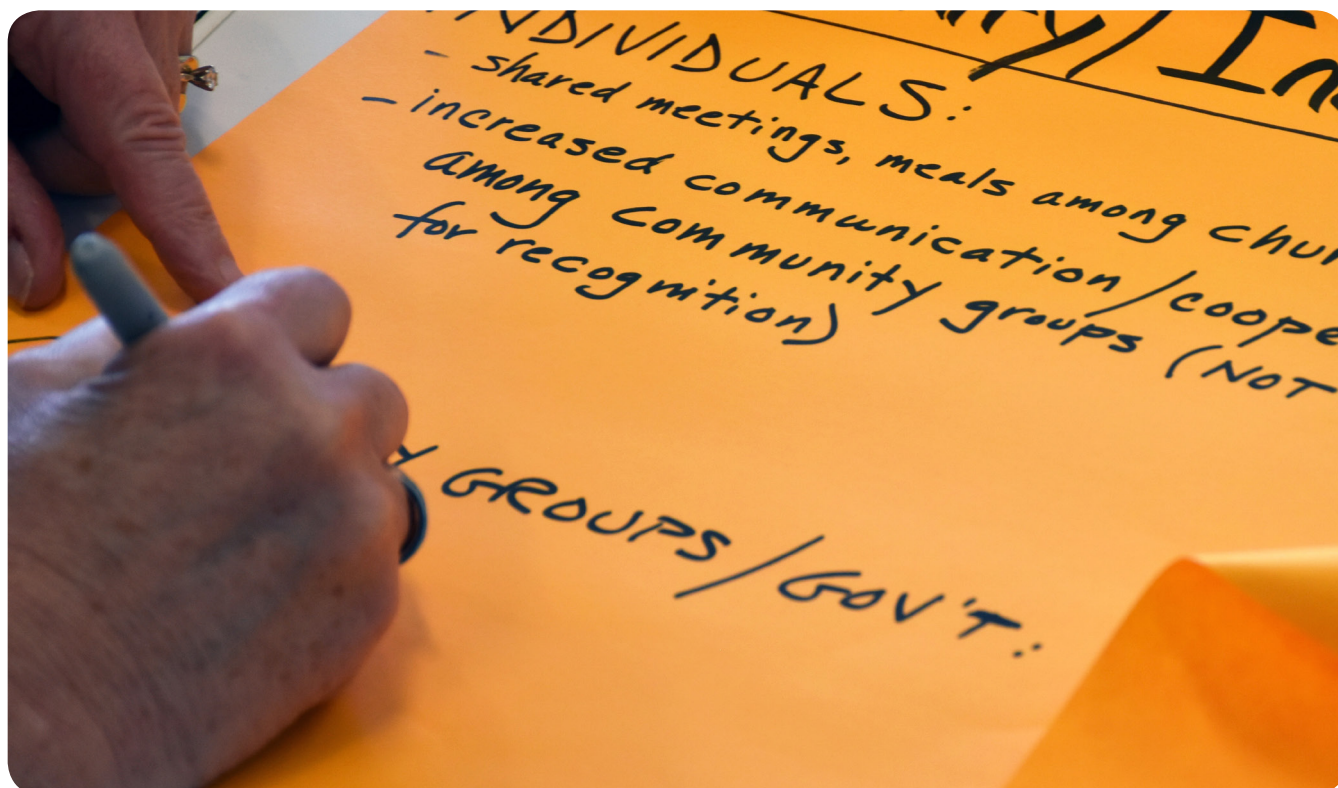
- » Happy family, happy life, parks, markets, shopping, car, house
- » Diverse economy
- » Relatively diversified economy
- » Get all dams out of Scioto and Olentangey
- » Water
- » Intellectual capacity
- » Identity seeking
- » Water
- » Water
- » Young, growing population
- » Tax-supported, well managed library system, parks and zoo
- » Well educated workforce compared with other cities
- » State government
- » OSU
- » Growing population
- » Interstate system
- » State capital
- » Location
- » Colleges and universities, including community colleges
- » Good place to raise a family
- » Location -- 55 percent of population in 8-hour drive
- » Cheap energy
- » Water
- » Community support organizations
- » People
- » Winning, diehard, loyal attitude about city
- » Strong master plan for development and infrastructure
- » Strong core medical services
- » State government
- » 211 service
- » Entertainment (sports, music, theater)

- » Business (several headquarters as magnets)
- » Infrastructure; public transportation including COTA's new routes to suburbs
- » Strong major employers
- » Green spaces
- » Strong base of diversely educated people
- » Most tolerant city in America
- » People believe in their communities
- » Columbus State CC collaborating well with OSU
- » Sober support network for sober students (Collegiate Recovery Community)
- » Sober high school coming in 2019 for recovering young people
- » Library system
- » Health care systems
- » Park systems
- » Colleges and all the educational, cultural and recreational opportunities they bring
- » Culture/Arts
- » Arena district
- » Health
- » Land
- » Moderate non-extreme weather
- » Well educated, experienced population
- » Central geographic location
- » Tolerance
- » Good roads and good communities with housing, libraries, liberals, professionals, research
- » OSU and other universities
- » University and diversity
- » Higher education
- » Columbus loves Columbus
- » People

The large group prioritized...

- » Non-profits: Rocking Horse, Springfield Promise Neighborhood, Fuller Center
- » Green spaces/parks
- » Education

- » Business (several headquarters as magnets)
- » Good place to raise family
- » Tolerant/inclusive
- » Location/logistics
- » Water
- » Cheap energy
- » Diversified economy
- » Vets are a resource/opportunity
- » Abundant advanced health care
- » Transportation opportunities



WHAT ACTIONS MIGHT WE TAKE TO MAKE COLUMBUS MORE VIBRANT IN THE FOLLOWING AREAS?

Improve educational outcomes

- » Internet access
- » Raise the bar for everyone/higher expectations
- » Adult education
- » It's more than schools -- everyone involved
- » Exposure to diverse cultures, ideas, families (minorities, handicapped, English second language)
- » Come to school without crime, litter, graffiti, dysfunction

Improve economic opportunities

- » Businesses are self interested
- » Can't unilaterally decide to not offer incentives
- » Cover my meds -- Columbus based biz that helps people get Rx
- » Education: don't need college degree to drive a truck (but what about automation?)
- » Do we need to redefine the role of corporations -- support for community
- » TIFF for Nationwide, and cascading effects of that business
- » Cheaper wages -- race to the bottom v supporting business
- » How to support public good?

Improve trust in government

- » Publicly funded campaigns
- » Perceptions of taxes -- how they're collected and spent
- » Eliminate gerrymandering
- » Incentives for people in the middle to vote
- » Need to move from political identity first to Ohioan first
- » Schooling in government and civics
- » Adjust focus on STEM at the expense of liberal arts
- » Models to engage civilly
- » Control of lobbyists

Improve access to resources

- » Healthcare -- social programs
- » Support for underserved population, homeless
- » Understand funding
- » Build neighborhood coalitions
- » Bring access to neighborhoods -- mobile
- » Transportation



STATEMENT TO NEIGHBORS

At the end of the conversation, we asked participants to write down a statement they would want their neighbors to know about community vibrancy, to share with those that couldn't attend the event:

- The dialogue was an opportunity to see where ideas converged and departed. Although there was many ideas put forward, I am hopeful that trends will emerge from many dialogues.
- It's so exciting to listen to intelligent people, passionate about ideas.
- Good to hear many ideas from all these people.
- To editors: more coverage of all forms of transportation, especially local, passenger, rail, and intercity options
- Tonight, I was able to learn perspectives of others in a respectful atmosphere. If only the whole world was that way.
- Thank you for sharing your ideas, hopes, and dreams.
- Good conversation about the community!
- Talking together makes me feel more apart of my community.
- To help a society, you must look at the least common denominator.
- Very thoughtful for the options and thoughts.
- Columbus is better off than we think.
- Two people who hold different points of view are often both right.
- There are a lot of people that still care about the quality of life in their community.
- Good to see there are some others who are looking for answers to the problems in our community and the answers are similar.
- Great experience but I was (am) disappointed so few showed up.

QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES

Using the discussion as a guide, here are the questions participants want political candidates to answer, with the help of Your Voice Ohio journalists.

- How different are the economic prospects in Columbus versus rural Ohio?
- Inefficient: Why do you give tax abatements when math says of \$1.00, \$0.35 goes to Federal government, \$0.15 to Ohio, and \$0.10 to lawyers and accountants?
- Is Columbus really the second most [economically]-segregated city in the nation?
- How can vets be activated and contribute to community?
- How can we get more people involved in these conversations?
- Can more dams be removed from the Olentangy and Scioto?
- How can employers/corporations serve both their shareholders and the communities in which they are located?
- What is more important, United or State?
- How will cheap energy benefit Ohio?
- Is Ohio's state budget ahead of plan due to US tax cut?
- How do we get to the central conflicting questions that force us to defend or rethink the policies that have got us to this point?
- Why do refugees get better treatment than veterans?
- How do I start the Revolution of Inclusion?
- How is vibrant community defined?

LOCAL MEDIA PARTNERS

The Columbus Dispatch

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The Columbus Dispatch is a daily newspaper based in Columbus, Ohio.

COLUMBUS Jewish News

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The Columbus Jewish News provides local, national and world news for the Jewish community of Greater Columbus

WOSU public media

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WOSU is a National Public Radio news and talk radio station licensed to Columbus, Ohio and serving the Columbus metro area. It is owned by The Ohio State University.

NEXT STEPS

Reporters across these organizations are dividing up the questions now and reporting answers back to the community.

For up-to-date information and reporting, visit:

YOURVOICEOHIO.ORG

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