

What's your future,

Green?

August 2019



Background

More than 30 people met with news media in the Akron-Canton suburban community of Green on August 6, 2019, for the third and final pre-election community conversation sponsored by the Your Voice Ohio media project, which is listening to people across the state discuss how they envision better places to live – and how to get there. Your Voice Ohio is a statewide collaborative that uses community engagement to rebuild trust between Ohioans and Ohio media.

The following report documents notes collected from this two-hour community problem-solving conversation.

Conversation Summary

In the third of [three pre-election meetings](#) in the suburban city of Green, residents took a deep dive into an issue they identified in two previous sessions as critical to the city's healthy growth: Diversity.

They said Green has two possible paths:

- Continue as a predominantly white, higher income, more educated community that becomes more organized, focused and predictable, though less tolerant of differences, or
- Become exposed to and supportive of other ways of life, more creative and challenging, though less certain of itself.

The conversation grew out of two previous meetings in which residents expressed concern that the city was intolerant to the point that people were unwilling to discuss differences or be open about vulnerabilities, such as illness, addiction and financial challenges. Moreover, there was concern that Green had become disproportionately old – as data show – that housing costs were creating challenges, there was tension at the high-school level between college and career paths and there is a marked lack of diversity regarding race and culture.

Green, like much of Ohio, lacks diversity that successful businesses desire, professionals and managers said in the third meeting. That makes the area less attractive to employers of the future. The city's children, because they are not exposed to diversity, will be less prepared for the job market than children who are exposed to multi-cultural experiences.

Practically speaking, they said, the sharp increase in retirement living creates a problem for city operations because retirement income is not taxed, though retirees require a new set of amenities. The conversation included a diversity of voices, including long-time residents who questioned the need for diversity, and many people of different religions and races.

They discussed possible changes that could attract diverse cultures and thinking:

- Moderately priced housing for seniors and young people
- Support for trade skills, including business-school partnerships and change in community attitude
- Cross-cultural experiences through government, schools and organizations
- Deliberate exposure to people with different life experiences
- More community events

The meetings are designed and run by the state-wide news media collaborative Your Voice Ohio, which is listening to residents all over the state in order to better represent their concerns and solutions in the news and in democratic processes. Over 30 meetings with more than 1,000 people have been held in communities from Cincinnati to Youngstown and Lima to Marietta.

Ideas from these meetings will be used to shape local issue coverage ahead of the 2019 local and 2020 national elections, giving the community a voice in the democratic process.

Doug Oplinger, Your Voice Ohio



Participants were asked to initially write their answer to a question, then discuss with their neighbors at a table conversation, and finally report back to the large group.

If Green's diversity remains as it is, what is the community's future?

- I do not believe Green has a future if it stays the same as is now
- Stagnant; Limited growth – but this may be a good thing, Biggest issue / obstacle come from the 'age' issue, Limited "growth" not good for diversity but for many residents good for others
- Continue to bubble -> staying on its track, continued inward focus, ignore the problems that do exist, struggle to work with one another, inward focus can further group us into various circles that do not interact, prejudice grows
- Less dynamic than with greater diversity, less understanding between people/groups, more possibility of conflict, more senior citizens.
- Lack growth, have community issues, will fall behind in regards to the other cities/states, not attract people/business, people will leave, lack cultural awareness, no balance
- It will become a unique place, it will be less dynamic than other community, our residents would be less prepared for the realities of the rest of the world, green is shifting from bedroom community to an economic hub but Green is part of a larger community & economy.
- Education - to fill jobs as to those needed, job in the area as not having to go out of the area for a livelihood
- Aging community
- Some things would stay the same
- We have an issue with an aging population how do we respond to that vs continuing to build unaffordable senior housing we need more affordable options, facilities, activities.
- Older community too expensive for young people not enough kids in the schools
- Older, wealthier, culturally isolated and boring, stable but stagnant
- Green will remain the same if we do not focus to consider all areas of diversity to how we approach citizens to community leaders to take reins in creating programs, policies to platforms for all diverse aspects
- Need more young people, and more diversity
- Religion, race, income, age, and business, not a good trend based on data, need to change the trajectory by introducing, add new program in high school, 2 year trade school, clubs and churches, housing, introduce small business restaurants
- It cannot - city has identified this and formed diversity & inclusion initiative, otherwise we lag without diversity
- The city would lose its ability to attract "new blood" be it industry, people, developments etc.
- Our future would be extremely sad and will continue to be one sided. The growth would not be diverse

If Green's diversity remains as it is, what is the community's future?

- It will have little meaningful growth, kids will not be ready for the world, older people will stay stuck in the past.
- The community will not reach its full potential socially and will not be as desirable of a place to live as it could be. Participation will not be as high, civic participation
- Fewer good jobs, children not equipped for the modern world, not enough STNAs to take care of the old
- Unrealized, lacking its full potential
- I think people tend to avoid change and without awareness, status quo would remain, focus on majority population could be a great draw for employees
- Brain drain, connection to schools (as taxpayers) with an increasing senior population. Top companies may choose to locate elsewhere - want diverse opps for employees
- Stagnant, increased tension, well headed, but some left behind
- Continue to become an older community. The tax base may shrink leading to a less nice community.
- Lose interest to young professionals, green will earn a reputation of intolerance whether deserved or not, it may attract more racially intolerant people
- Continue as WASP higher city, mini hudson/ Jackson, Welcomes diversity
- Shrinking tax base (seniors don't pay income taxes)
- Will not grow much from its current size, same relative proportion except for planned growth as an assisted living community
- Will an aging population there will be much more turnover as people age out, i would assume the stats show far fewer younger people are buying and living in Green. That might explain the lack of population growth also, housing prices are high-ish here.
- Fewer and fewer young people will stay or come back. Suggesting less consideration of new culture and interest or connection to the community at large. How will the long term residents appreciate diverse change.
- Children ill-equipped to deal with real world
- Not attractive to employers
- Less affordable for seniors
- Unaffordable housing
- Become fearful, more fearful
- Won't have children in the city
- Unattractive to young people
- Stable, isolated and boring
- Gain a reputation of intolerance – homogeneity breeds intolerance
- Lack full potential
- Fearful of change
- Lack diverse food



What are the positive and negative effects if Green encourages assimilation?

Positive +

- Maintains status quo
- You become liked; become your untrue self; this becomes the norm
- Comforting
- Communication more effective because a common language
- Less friction, more productivity
- Sense of belonging
- Encourages charity, solving problems together, helping each other, working towards common goal
- Maintain status quo
- Broken spirit
- Easier to talk and interact with others; belonging; cooperation; better communication
- Better communication
- Belonging, familiarity, comfort
- Cooperative
- Not a good idea
- We are united by shared beliefs
- Accomplish goals easier; less disagreements
- Decisions are made quickly without push back
- Able to understand process, get specific message across, anonymity, just blend in
- Group can retain its identity
- Able to understand the process
- Learn structure; respect of rules; understanding of what is or was
- Can cooperate to achieve more
- Less friction; belonging; common goal
- Common values for the good of the community
- Perception of safety & security
- Better community – we want to meet others that are like us
- Shared values & family orientation

Negative -

- Lacks openness to new ideas
- Dampens creativity

- (becoming untrue self) Causes stress, turns into physical ailments
- If can't assimilate, live in isolation
- Lost customs, overly homogeneous, feeling lost or unappreciated
- Who makes the rules
- Boring
- Lose your individuality; feeling isolated; don't learn about different people
- Discouraging to heritage
- Isolation
- Stagnation
- Dangerous; forced pride; growth stagnant; experience of negativity is possible
- Long term conform but not inform of different thinking patterns
- Loose cultural awareness
- Less cultural awareness
- A person must be open to different things and different people
- Bland and uninteresting
- People may feel pressure to give up their diversity
- Disregards unique ideas; don't listen to others; lose personal identity
- New & existing people can be at odds; pressure to join group, but lose some of yourself in the process
- Loss of identity, uniqueness, no reason for change, creativity stifled, new ideas unwelcomed
- Insiders and outsiders can both feel at odds
- Your voice may not be heard
- Loss of identity; loss of uniqueness; no room for change
- Lose creativity
- Lose uniqueness and perspectives
- May not grow optimally due to lack of ideas, force our experience to stay the same
- If the surrounding community changes to favor diversity strongly, we may shrink with size
- Lose identity for sake of conformity

What are the positive and negative effects if Green encourages inclusion?

Positive +

- Exposes to unique ideas and customs
- Appreciate differences
- Builds trust
- Each person can belong but be different
- Accepted as you are/variety
- Creative because more people involved
- Empathy – learn to deal with different kinds of people
- Become liked by groups
- Becomes country norm
- Exposure to different and unique ideas and customs
- Appreciation of each other's differences
- Diversity of ideas and thoughts
- Comfortable in your own skin
- Variety, dynamic, acceptance
- Broaden your mind
- Teaches people with cultural differences more understanding in a world/community that is ever changing
- Variety, dynamic, acceptance
- Acceptance, learning
- Growth for all people
- Broader ability to welcome others in diversity
- Welcomed input to new and potentially healthy ideas
- Be open to change
- Promotes growth, builds trust, honesty
- Awareness, open mind, promotes growth
- Can provide forward thinking, provides involvement
- Happier community
- We get to know things about others that you may not have known
- Person is free to be themselves which makes people happy
- Diverse culture, pride

- A community needs both, inclusion & assimilation, to thrive
- Don't want to assimilate to the point that we sacrifice what makes us individuals
- Learn about different cultures
- Become open to celebrate differences in people
- Become sympathetic to struggles suffered by some groups
- Learn and appreciate differences; accomplish more
- Individuals have a greater sense of self-worth, positive self esteem
- New ideas
- Able to share & learn from each other group dynamics with everyone bringing different skills
- People feel welcomed, empowered – give them a voice, help people feel comfortable sharing their ideas
- exposure to new things, learn from each other's, embrace new ideas
- give everyone a place at the table expansion leads to growth
- expose people to new concepts
- people feel welcomed
- able to learn and share from each other
- expansion of culture, identity, learning
- more creativity, enhanced flavor, new experiences
- Develop empathy, easier to solve problems with different perspectives
- New ideas; community growth; opportunity

Negative -

- Not everyone agrees
- Fear of not being accepted
- A diminishing of those who don't agree; excludes those who are not tolerant; risk of losing history
- Feel pressure not allowing true self to be expressed
- Fearful
- False pretense emotional stress mental physical ailments
- Tough to understand people different than yourself
- Fear the unknown

What are the positive and negative effects if Green encourages inclusion?

- Stagnation
- Not accepting different people, you lose people
- Bigot
- Could discourage (some) to assimilate to be included
- Fear, uncomfortable
- Harder to understand
- Difficulty with communication (language)
- Unable to agree
- A consensus may be difficult to reach
- Too many competing ideas/thoughts could lead to slowdown of progress without clear direction
- Hard to function without boundaries/direction
- Diminishing of history – it should still also be included
- Don't focus only on where we're going
- Can be harder to function as a group
- Diminishing of history
- Too many competing ideas/thoughts could slow down progress without clear direction
- Less cohesion, more friction
- Transitional feelings
- Closed minded
- It's more work



Problem Solving Sessions

4 tables explored what action we might take to make Green more attractive to outsiders and increase our diversity.

Tasks for governments/schools/institutions:

- Partnership between corporations & schools
- Having a central place for everyone in the community
- Create opportunities for community members to experience different cultures. i.e. block party, festivals, etc.
- International clubs & cultural Exchange
- Police bias training
- Housing options available to lower earning individuals
- Remove discriminatory practices in local policy
- Educational opportunities about religions, cultures, food
- Volunteer opportunities
- Diversity in leadership positions
- Offer different cultural opportunities to expose people to something they may

Tasks for individuals:

- Teach love & respect in the home
- Better communication; attending cultural events; volunteering
- Meet new people
- Accept change
- Break out of our social circle, model for our children
- Get to know one another
- More accepting of others
- Educate self
- Place yourselves in someone else's shoes and try to see things from their perspective (i.e. bridges out of poverty)
- Do not need to fully understand, but a responsibility to learn to accept
- Get to know your neighbors, coworkers, others
- Most people want the same thing but we have to talk to each other to discover we have more in common than we realize

Tasks for news media:

- Emphasize positive happenings in local communities
- Honesty, fairness, integrity
- Use media to celebrate diversity
- Focus on diverse people from Green with significant achievement
- Bring groups together to discuss and highlight benefits of cultural experiences
- Change the narrative
- Draw attention to people of different cultures doing positive things in their community

What is something you learned in this conversation about diversity that you would like the community to know?

- It takes us all to make the changes needed with honesty and open mindedness
- Rephrasing diversity education from a focus on the negative to a celebration of the positive
- That there are a lot of people who are not happy with nondiversity
- I would like the community to know that there are different people out there that can shed light onto various problems that need to be handled
- People are more open to diversity than what I would have believed before this meeting
- People see the term “diversity” om color, that’s not all that’s included in the definition
- Confusion
- Diversity spurs creativity
- We need to work harder to bring diverse people together
- We are all human beings, “Everyone is equal”
- You need to always have an open mind concerning things you are not familiar with
- Green is more diverse than most know
- Being inclusive and diverse may not be comfortable or easy, but it is worth the effort to be a more dynamic, progressive community
- Diversity has many more facets than I realized
- Diversity creates an environment where everyone is valued and has a voice
- People are similar than they are different
- We are not that different. We may have some differences but that doesn’t have to define us.
- There are people working hard to make a change which results in a better-rounded community
- Learning new ideas is a good thing
- Food brings diverse people together
- There are people willing to continue to work to achieve success with this subject
- Green has work to do to increase appreciation of diversity
- Diversity can be achieved through appreciation, culture of differences BUT it is equally important to find common ground. Have to have both fun and a strong community
- (Diversity) can lead to a sense of belonging
- Diversity exists in all forms, age, sex, education, income, etc
- I learned there are still people who don’t understand or accept why diversity is a good thing



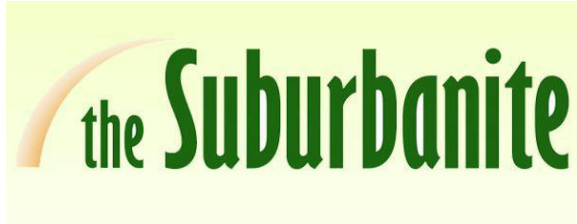
If we were to hold more solutions-oriented conversations that you think would help the news media better represent you in upcoming election, what topics would you want explored?

- Hate and the harm it does to the community
- Don't even give attention to racism and hate. Do not give it a platform for people looking for attention in a negative way
- Ask difficult follow-up questions to force the candidates to understand the issue
- Give all candidates the same press time
- Talk about the rough topics
- Hold politicians to a higher standard
- We need to explore how we can lead out government to help the people they live with instead of running them down
- Commitment to education
- Our community is focusing on diversity and inclusion and how citizens portray diversity
- Our school administration is creating policy and procedures for staff and students
- Reduce or eliminate news being slanted due to media accepting financial influence to promote a given idea or issue
- Educational policy
- Family-building
- Diversity
- Growing senior population and its effects in regards to health care and affordable housing, assisted care, etc
- Facts; no fighting; local issues, how they affect us
- Would like to know more facts about candidates and issues, not opinions
- Get candidates to actually answer the question they are asked. Don't let them beat around the bush without answering the question.
- Ways to build relationships
- Ways to inspire community participation
- Be less judgmental politically, be more focused on local people and issues from a human standpoint, not the shock value, truly learn to be objective
- Comparative analysis of health care delivery and payment.
- How can we better serve unwanted children.
- What does it mean to be educated
- What is community?
- Things to bring us together
- How to bring different communities together
- Systemic changes to the health care industry
- Fair, proportionate taxes
- Our elected leader does NOT represent the views and opinions of all constituents
- Nothing getting done in Congress
- Change in leadership
- Term limits
- Health care
- Senior housing
- Wages
- Roundabouts
- Campaign finance
- School funding
- Plan to work together (media)
- Eliminate nastiness
- Honest answers
- Get out of the politics and care about the people (media)
- For Green: Development, diversity, traffic/ infrastructure
- For Ohio/USA: Employment, immigration, real solutions, not soundbite and spin
- Jobs
- Health care
- Education
- Economy
- Student loans
- Inflation (price of food)
- Affordable housing
- Better public transportation for suburbs
- The coming economic restructuring and disruption due to AI, machine learning and robotics

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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Participating Organizations

