



Summary of Hillcrest Visioning Workshop and Open House April 06 2013

Executive Summary

The aim of the workshop was to create a Draft Vision Statement reflecting neighbourhood values and participant perspectives of Hillcrest twenty years into the future. The shared vision is intended to serve as a foundation for building the Hillcrest Neighbourhood Plan. It is also the framework to evaluate the suitability of ideas which will be generated in the planning charrettes scheduled for April 20 and May 11, 2013.

Nineteen people took part in the Visioning Workshop which was held at Elijah Smith School. Another ten people dropped into the Open House afterward.

During the workshop, three overarching and interconnected themes were identified:

- Hillcrest as a 'connected' community, including social connectivity, and connecting trails and green spaces to other neighbourhoods.
- Hillcrest's 'village character' expressed in a variety of words like, 'smallness' 'enclave', 'interconnected community', 'quaintness', or 'country residential community'.
- A desire for organic or evolutionary growth at a pace and scale similar to what exists presently, retaining the 'diversity' both social and architectural that has emerged over the years.

Overall participants are happy with Hillcrest as it is today and would like it to remain relatively unchanged though the inevitability of change is recognized. The crucial aspect is the scale, style and pace of change. Renewal is seen as important, but ideally it will take the form of renovation, repairs and adaptations with less emphasis on new development. Participants were also keen to qualify the concept of 'connectivity' which was perceived as both a concern and a desire. Residents wish to protect the eclectic neighbourly atmosphere that exists socially, and would like to retain their 'hidden', 'separate' feeling. Participants preferred to be connected to the rest of Whitehorse by trails. The value given to green space and trails is a time tested, unchanging theme also expressed in the 2005 beautification consultation, and then later in the Planning Charrette of the Hillcrest Community Association in 2009/2010. It links all of the other themes.

In terms of future implications, 'functioning stewardship' will be important to conserve and improve Hillcrest's cherished green spaces. A park management plan for Paddy's Pond/Ice lake

Park area is an initial step in this direction. Stewardship is understood by participants to include all aspects of community development such as preserving Hillcrest's architectural character, caring for older people, providing opportunities for safe play for youngsters, promoting local economy with mixed use home/offices, caring for the maintenance of all public areas, etc. Participants also expressed a need for community capacity building to ensure the residents' association is active in the long term future; able to address new needs and 'increased pressures'.

A challenge is to define what is meant by 'village character', not only in physical terms of measurement which were proposed at this workshop, but also in terms of qualifying and monitoring the social dimension. What social interactions create a feeling of 'village character' for individuals? How is it different for varying age groups and income groups? Are there ways of encouraging this quality of interaction or does it need to arise spontaneously? Understanding the social aspect of 'village character' is essential for Hillcrest to welcome diverse residents (a shared value) while maintaining its community quality and small neighbourhood feeling.

Seven of the ten people who attended the Open House after the workshop "supported the vision statement as drafted". This suggests that although they did not participate in drafting it, they were comfortable with the result. The Visioning Workshop has created a good first step to build upon.

Summary of Group Work at the Visioning Workshop

In the morning group session participants identified shared values and envisaged the changes Hillcrest faces, and what the neighbourhood's future needs might be. Each group presented their work, discussed the values they had developed and ranked them in order of priority. In the afternoon, new groups were formed to take these values and begin to make a vision statement. Each group presented their statements. A general discussion followed as participants debated wording and themes to arrive at the Draft Vision Statement.

Group One:

Morning Value Session

- Values: Diverse, mixed neighbourhood (age, income, housing), conservation of history and green spaces/trails, connectivity between people and trails to other parts of Whitehorse, and an enclave feeling. Need for more living options for aging in place, central community meeting place/garden, and increased "mixed use" including business, etc.

After Lunch Session

The group draft vision statement evolved from ideas about: 'village character', 'respecting the past', 'connected by trails', 'natural environment'.

- Group One Draft Vision Statement: *"Hillcrest aims to maintain its village character while evolving in a way that respects our past, and is connected by trails to the natural environment, other neighbourhoods and amenities."*

Group Two:

Morning Value Session

- Values: Affordability/availability, not polished character, variety of housing including mixed family types, small and safe, and green spaces/trails. Need for traffic calming, community centre/multi purpose gathering point, functioning stewardship to maintain green spaces and 'country feel' and also develop community capacity to respond to changes/pressures

After Lunch Session

The group draft vision statement evolved from ideas about: 'village', 'connected neighbourhood', 'caring about environment', 'thriving', 'mixed and inclusive'.

- Group Two Draft Vision Statement: *"Hillcrest is a connected neighbourhood with character."*

Group Three:

Morning Value Session

- Values: Quaint/small neighbourhood feel, green spaces/trails, affordability, peace and tranquility, interactive community. Need for community meeting space, aging in place, preserving and increasing walkability, infrastructure renewal.

After Lunch Session

The group draft vision statement evolved from ideas about: 'community – role pets play (e.g. dog walking)', 'village', 'connectivity', 'safety for children', 'nature'.

- Group Three Draft Vision Statement: *"Hillcrest is a unique village neighbourhood, full of possibilities, with nature as our shared back yard."*

Main Discussion Points:

Highlights of the three groups working together to write the Draft Vision Statement included:

- Consensus on the concept of 'village' while accepting Hillcrest is not actually a village. To resolve the term 'village character' seemed acceptable to many participants.
- Connectivity was interpreted to be a difficult word to use in the vision statement and effort was made to qualify this term. It was used to mean connectivity between residents, with trails to reach other parts of Whitehorse, and a unifying connection in a community meeting space.
- 'Nature as our shared backyard' was a phrase supported by most participants but it was argued this could be open to misinterpretation. A distinction was drawn between public and private land.
- Overall there was some difficulty in creating a succinct, vibrant visual image or expression that captured what Hillcrest would be like to live in twenty years from now. It was also difficult to define the complex terms accurately in few words. Underlying this participants' appreciation for Hillcrest as it is today made the concept of change a preference for renovation rather than the introduction of new elements. The group discussion resulted in the group Draft Vision Statement below. Some participants suggested the Draft Vision Statement will need to be further refined

Collective Draft Vision Statement:

"Hillcrest conserves its village character and is connected by trails to shared natural spaces, neighbourhoods and amenities."

Measuring Progress in Plan Implementation:

- Narrow roads with bioswales instead of curbs and gutters
- Ability to travel to other parts of Whitehorse without driving
- Stewardship so green spaces are not degraded
- Conservation of housing character, (e.g. style, size, options available and affordability)
- Infrastructure improvements done in a timely fashion

Common Themes and Values

The value given to green spaces and trails, repeatedly expressed, is partly what makes Hillcrest a compact, self-contained neighbourhood. Participants are committed to retaining a green buffer zone around Hillcrest.

As mentioned previously 'connectivity' in all its dimensions is both a concern and desire. Participants want to protect the neighbourhood's character which is reflected physically in building form, 'funky' appearance, history, proximity to open space, and socially by diversity of income, age, occupation and lifestyle. As one group explained, the community's eclectic character is part of its 'soul' and change need to be appreciated in that context. There is a desire to be more connected to the rest of Whitehorse but only by trails.

Linking to 'connectivity' all groups identified a need for a central community meeting place, be it a community greenhouse, gazebo and barbecue, or building.

Aspects of the term 'village character' were expressed in a variety of ways throughout the day in words like, 'smallness', 'eclectic', 'funky', 'quaintness', 'historic' or 'country residential feel'.

The themes of 'diversity' and 'safety for children', 'aging in place' 'affordability', 'inclusivity', 'mixed incomes' can be unified as a value that favours organic renewal.

Although less discussed, the concept of aging in place and having affordable semi-independent accommodation for older residents is an emerging need. Respect for the past, and the conservation of the historic aspects of Hillcrest is also a shared value.

Implications for the future

This Draft Vision Statement offers a challenge is to define what is meant by 'village character', not only within physical terms of measurement which were proposed at this workshop, but also in terms of understanding the social dimension, to ensure that Hillcrest can continue to welcome new and diverse residents (a shared value) and maintain its community connectedness. The Open House after the workshop demonstrated a relatively high level of support for the Draft Vision Statement, as seven of the ten who attended "supported the vision statement as drafted".

Many thanks to everyone who participated and worked so hard to make the workshop a success!