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## **Our Valley survey finds residents calling for more collaboration**

WENATCHEE — Residents see a clear need for stronger community collaboration, particularly among government and public agencies and among cultures, a survey by a local non-partisan planning group has found.

The survey, completed by more than 1,300 residents to date, is being conducted by Our Valley What's Next, a group led by the United Way of Chelan and Douglas Counties. The group unveiled the initial survey results at a Make Difference Day event Saturday at Pybus Public Market.

More than 100 people attended Saturday's event. Participants broke into six groups to discuss vision ideas that originated from the survey. They also brainstormed "easy win" projects and "game-changers" that could potentially be included in a strategic plan that Our Valley What's Next will be developing over the next year.

"The survey results triggered several interesting ideas on Saturday," said Alan Walker, United Way executive director. "Among them was merging the two cities of Wenatchee and East Wenatchee. That received support from participants but it's just an idea at this point. The bigger picture is that residents clearly want everyone to collaborate across geographic, political and cultural boundaries to build a better future. And they want our local governments, public agencies and community-based groups to coordinate decisions and to spend resources wisely."

Other general takeaways from the survey results:

— Residents recognize the region is growing and changing economically, culturally and socially. Along with that recognition, comes some angst among the populace regarding the pace of change and collaboration. In particular, people are supportive of both protecting and enhancing the valley's quality of life.

— There is a strong desire to capitalize on existing 'Our Valley' assets, including outdoor recreation, natural resources, the diverse cultures, and the public power system. At the same time, there is a strong desire for new facilities and infrastructure and new ways of thinking.

— Residents are eager for the community to roll up its sleeves, listen, collaborate, and get to work.

— Survey respondents also are optimistic about the future of 'Our Valley.' More than 58 percent of respondents believe the future will be somewhat or significantly better – while only 19 percent believe it will be worse. About 23 percent said it will be the same.

The survey was distributed beginning in early September via print products and online. Residents can continue to take the survey at <http://www.ourvalleywhatsnext.com/> through the end of the year.

Here are the top responses to date to the following three key survey questions:

**Question 1:** What is one thing you value most about living in Our Valley?

**Top responses:** Outdoors and recreation; the people; natural and scenic resources and climate; personal safety; small-town feel.

**Question 2:** What is one way you see our valley changing now?

**Top responses:** Population growth; Latino community emergence; increased traffic congestion; commercial expansion; better amenities.

**Question 3:** What is one vision idea you have for the future of Our Valley?

**Top responses:** Outdoor recreation enhancements; improved schools and four-year university; better amenities; more events and entertainment; everyone working together.

Walker said the survey results, ideas and comments generated at Saturday's event, as well as additional community outreach over the next several months, will be used to develop strategic action plans for the area. He said he expects those plans to be solidified by fall 2016.

Our Valley What's Next is an independent, nonpartisan, community-based visioning and planning project established to engage the people of the Wenatchee Valley, along with our key government, business, civic and community partners. The process seeks to address themes that are key in revitalizing and sustaining the Wenatchee Valley and its communities over time. Specifically, Our Valley has identified three critical areas in order for the area to thrive: Education and workforce development, alleviation of poverty, and regional solutions to valley-wide problems.

The project is aligned with Frontier Communications' America's Best Communities (ABC) competition established to promote economic revitalization in communities served by Frontier and DISH TV. Other contest sponsors include CoBank and The Weather Channel. The first phase of Our Valley (vision planning) has been funded in part by a \$35,000 award for being a quarterfinalist in the ABC competition. This award has been matched with \$15,000 from regional corporate mentor Atco Communications and \$15,000 from the United Way of Chelan and Douglas Counties.

The United Way serves as fiscal agent for the project and is coordinating Our Valley's ABC competition submission. On Nov. 6, Our Valley will be submitting an application to be one of the national semifinalists (which comes with a \$100,000 prize). In 2017, America's Best Communities will select three winners — first place (\$3 million prize), second place (\$2 million) and third place (\$1 million).

For more on Our Valley: <http://www.ourvalleywhatsnext.com/>

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