



**WHAT'S NEXT
QUE SIGUE**

Report on the Our Valley What's Next Community Stakeholder Interviews

Our Valley What's Next | Neustro Valle Que Sigue

**Conducted and Compiled by Steven Ames
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INTRODUCTION

In June and July 2015, Steven Ames, Principal of Steven Ames Planning conducted a series of interviews with selected stakeholders of the proposed Wenatchee Valley regional engagement process – now known as ***Our Valley What's Next | Neustro Valle Que Sigue***. As part of these one-hour interviews, participants were asked two sets of questions:

- **Future of Wenatchee Valley.** Their thoughts on the future of the Wenatchee Valley, including: what they most valued about the region; how the region is changing; what might be the biggest challenges for the future of the region; and finally their visions for the region and ways those visions might be realized.
- **Regional Engagement Process.** Their general thoughts on an engagement/visioning process for the region, including: specific challenges and opportunities of such a process; how to best engage the community in the process, especially people from their own networks; and finally, what topics should the process focus on. (Note that this second set of questions varied slightly from the initial round of interviews conducted in June.)

Of approximately **49** invited participants for these quickly arranged interviews, **36** people participated in **19** interview sessions over the course of two days, with most sessions involving two or more participants. (Attribution of comments to specific interviewees has been removed from this summary document. In addition, some interviewee comments that did not directly relate to the specific questions posed have not been included in this summary.)

Stakeholder interview participants included:

- **Rafael Aguilar**, North Central Washington Hispanic Chamber
- **Sally Brawley**, Eastmont Metropolitan Parks District
- **Jennifer Bushong**, Town Toyota Center
- **Richard DeRock**, LinkTransit
- **Bill Dobbins**, Douglas County PUD
- **Ruth Esparza**, Northwest Justice Project, Wenatchee City Council
- **Brian Fiones**, Wenatchee School District
- **Norma Gallegos**, Helping Hands Citizenship Coordinator
- **Linda Haglund**, Wenatchee Downtown Association
- **Jesus Hernandez**, Community Choice, Wenatchee School District
- **Jim Huffman**, Port of Douglas County
- **Laura Jaecks**, Confluence Technology Center, Wenatchee School Board
- **Steve Jenkins**, Douglas County Commissioner
- **Steve King**, City of Wenatchee
- **Frank Kuntz**, Mayor, City of Wenatchee
- **Craig Larsen**, Port of Chelan County
- **Steve Lacy**, Mayor, City of East Wenatchee
- **Stacy Luckensmeyer**, Wenatchee Valley College
- **Mark Marney**, Eastmont School District
- **Mike Mackey**, Port of Chelan County
- **Deb Miller**, Community Choice
- **Mark Miller**, Town Toyota Center
- **Gustavo Montoya**, El Mundo Newspaper
- **Donte Quinine**, Wenatchee Valley College

- **Jim Richardson**, Wenatchee Valley College
- **Jenny Rickel**, Greater Wenatchee Area Technology Alliance
- **Ben Sappington**, Moss Adams, United Way Board
- **Jay Smith**, Express Employment Professionals
- **Shiloh Schauer**, Wenatchee Valley Chamber
- **Mary Small**, Chelan Douglas Health District
- **Beth Stipe**, North Central Washington Community Foundation
- **Mark Urdahl**, Port of Chelan County
- **Jeff Wilkens**, Chelan Douglas Transportation Council
- **Allison Williams**, City of Wenatchee
- **Rufus Woods**, The Wenatchee World
- **Steve Wright**, Chelan County PUD

The information gathered through these interviews contributed directly to the framing of the process and the design of activities specifically intended to engage the local population, as well as to the actual content of the community's emerging vision and plan.

This version of the Stakeholder Interviews report contains a summary of interview content, focusing on answers to four questions about the future of the Wenatchee Valley. This summary is an amalgam of all respondents. Individual views expressed here do not necessarily reflect those of Our Valley What's Next committee member or the project as a whole. A complete transcript of the Our Valley stakeholder interviews is available upon request from the Our Valley What's Next project.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE FUTURE OF THE WENATCHEE VALLEY

1. What do you most value about the Wenatchee Valley?

When asked this question many of the Wenatchee Valley community stakeholders described the obvious assets of the area, including its physical setting, scenic beauty, sunny weather, natural environment and outdoor recreational opportunities. They also mentioned the region's centralized location in the Pacific Northwest as a major asset. Interviewees described the area's small town feel as a key quality, including things like its welcoming nature, caring people, and family orientation. They valued the healthy lifestyles and quality of life the Valley affords, including safety, lack of traffic congestion, schools, medical facilities, and other community amenities. They also valued some of the more singular qualities of the area, including its agricultural economy and heritage, the Columbia River, and locally owned hydroelectric dams and inexpensive public power. Interviewees appreciated the community's reputation for pitching in and working together to come up with creative solutions to local challenges. They see the people of the Valley as innovators and visionaries by tradition, and as a diverse community with a strong spirit.

2. How is the Wenatchee Valley changing today – here and now?

The Wenatchee Valley is changing significantly, and our stakeholder interviews underscored this fact. Some of these changes bode well for the growing region and its communities, but other changes are challenging traditional aspects of the region and some of its traditional, business-as-usual ways. Below is an overview of stakeholder perceptions on change:

Population. Population growth in the Valley is a major driving force, with lots of people moving to the region for its quality of life and affordability. The Medical Center has boosted our attractiveness to retirees. Another aspect of the Valley's changing population is its increasing diversity. This is mainly due to growth in the area's Hispanic population, but also includes people of other ethnic backgrounds, including Indian, Russian, and Middle Eastern. The Latino community is finding its voice and becoming more visible and active in community affairs. This is necessitating some adjustments on the part of some longer-term residents. There is also some tension between the region's "old guard" leadership and a newer, younger, more engaged generation. Young people are getting organized in the region and becoming more politically active. The Valley still loses some of its younger population, who go away to college and don't return, in part due to a lack of employment.

Economy. The Valley's economy went through a flat period in the late 2000s, but it is back in growth mode and new businesses are on the increase. Agriculture continues to be a driver of the region's economy, although a large number of agriculture jobs are not well paid. There is a lot of innovation in the fruit growing industry, but it is uncertain how this technological change will affect the need for farm workers in the future. The region's cheap power continues to attract industry and bring revenue into the region. At the same time, it is possible we will lose the Alcoa facility, which was one user of our abundant electric power. Construction has grown, driven to some degree by the energy boom in North Dakota (fabrication, etc.). There is also a growing tourism industry in the region, although it mainly creates service sector jobs. We have not seen parallel growth in professional or other good-paying jobs. To continue to progress we have to generate more professional jobs.

Growth and Development. East Wenatchee has been experiencing a growth spurt. More businesses are moving into that side of the river and larger residential subdivisions are being built in Douglas County. Wenatchee, on the other hand, has little new developable land and land costs are high because supply is constrained. There are strategies to accommodate more growth in Wenatchee, including annexation of old industrial areas for redevelopment. Wenatchee also has areas along the river that have potential for redevelopment. Pybus Marketplace and River Nine Apartments are examples of newer approaches to urban development that are bringing density and vibrancy to the city center. Traffic congestion in the region is increasing overall, but we are starting to reframe the discussion about transportation not as an end in itself and taking land use and planning into greater consideration in our transportation planning. Link Transit provides a significantly higher level of service than in comparable regions, in part because people from outlying communities come into Wenatchee/East Wenatchee for jobs, services, shopping, medical care, and education.

Health, Safety, and Cultural Diversity. In terms of the community, there is still an “us and them” environment, and divisions between rich/poor, Anglo/Latino continue to exist. However, with increasing ethnic diversity, more people are reaching out to one another and finding commonalities. Our knowledge of the population is improving. We are looking at how we can improve health and wellness. Change is slow in this regard, but it is happening. In Wenatchee, the community is finally looking at the general health of its south end (South Wenatchee), which is poorer and more Hispanic. The City of Wenatchee is working hard to engage South Wenatchee, which needs improvements to urban services. The population of South End is starting to find its voice. The Hispanic Chamber is growing and changing as well, and is not limited to Hispanic businesses. In terms of social services, many organizations experience continued strains on their resources, but the wider community has also stepped up on the giving side. Improvements are coming to mental health, but we need a drug court. Everywhere in the Valley there are many more organized recreational and fitness activities.

Education. The community is stepping up its financial support for local schools; this is a newer trend and reflects a growing pride of place. The School Board is also taking more proactive stances on education. Wenatchee Valley College serves a large geographic area with everything from skills to professions, and does a lot of outreach and recruiting. It is moving forward on two fronts, including a new nursing program and a proposal for an applied engineering program. Most of the College’s students seek to transfer to a four-year degree program. While it will continue to be a community college, there are options for local students to pursue four-year degrees through Central Washington and Heritage University. The College is currently 42% Hispanic and 5% Native American, and thus rapidly approaching a majority of students of color. “Running Start” is the College’s fast track program for AA degrees for adult learners and everything in between.

Community & Governance. Historically, the Wenatchee Valley has been divided by geographic and governmental boundaries, but this is starting to change. There is a heightened awareness of the need for greater collaboration in the region. The area’s two major cities are different in terms of their respective populations, cultures and governance structures. The City of Wenatchee provides a full range of municipal services. In recent years it has faced financial challenges, including the Town Toyota Center situation. It has

also become more proactive, with employees who work hard at serving the public. East Wenatchee has had a more stable financial environment. It is well managed financially and has just one bond to pay off before it is virtually debt-free. The City of East Wenatchee's lesser degree of control over its utilities has affected its ability to direct its economic development, while the City of Wenatchee has had greater control in that regard. A very positive trend: the two mayors of our two major cities communicate regularly and are working well together. The youth of the region are increasingly stepping up into leadership roles in government and local communities. The Internet and social media are changing the way we communicate and deliberate.

3. What is the biggest challenge for the future of the Wenatchee Valley?

Stakeholders cited a wide range and number of specific challenges for the future of the Wenatchee Valley.

- **Population Growth.** We are growing and this will bring change and new challenges. More retirees are moving here. "Climate refugees" will also be moving here, escaping more extreme weather in other parts of the country.
- **Income and Poverty.** Income disparity is greater here than the nation as a whole. Generational (Hispanic) families are improving their economic status; but migrant workers are not. How do we bridge the income divide? How do we address poverty and the issues that come with poverty? We don't have a basis for a middle class life in the Valley going forward. We don't have enough jobs in the "middle" that pay middle-class wages. Housing affordability and workforce development are connected issues.
- **Youth Population.** Our youth poverty rates are very high. We have a large population of youth who are very stationary in terms of their upward mobility. This creates an enormous drain on social services. Even though our youth are more connected through communication, there are also more youth with special social and developmental needs. This generation could be an enormous asset to the Valley – if they develop into a good workforce, hard working entrepreneurs, and skill and trained workers.
- **Cultural Diversity.** Connecting our cultures, especially Anglos and Latinos, is a challenge. There are two worlds here that don't mix well. How do we live better with the Hispanic influence when many people still resist the Latino culture? We do have diversity here but it's not the same as in larger urban areas. Wenatchee is a very conservative place. How do we drop our language and cultural barriers? It is difficult to find events that bring both communities together.
- **Health.** We used to have the second most highly rated medical center in the state but that reputation has declined because we can't recruit doctors. After 2020 we will be completely responsible for the health of the underserved populations of our region at the local level. We will have to focus more on prevention, which will take a larger community effort.
- **Education.** There is a lack of leadership in our schools. Our migrant populations can be a challenge for local schools. The long-term consequence is that we may not have a well-trained workforce. We need to establish or recruit a four-year university that allows students to stay here.
- **Economy.** Fruit growing is a large part of our employment, but not as big as some think. Creating higher paying jobs is a major challenge. At the same time, there is a lack of qualified workers. As people elevate out of poverty, where will they work? There has to be more skilled labor jobs – and workers to fill them. Our culture could be a barrier to the companies that would stimulate our growth. There are not a lot of high paying jobs

out there. How will we orient our educational system to grow those kinds of employers and opportunities? Construction and manufacturing will be affected by energy costs, port shutdowns on the West Coast, and continued skilled labor force issues.

- **Agriculture.** The agriculture industry is changing. How will it be affected by immigration reform? Agricultural wages are an issue. Will our agriculture community continue to give philanthropically if their industry suffers economically? What happens to the tree fruit industry with the pressure to build houses on orchard lands? Will there be a shift from fruit to wine growing?
- **Climate Change.** We are experiencing warmer temperatures. We have been experiencing more droughts in the region. Water availability is an issue and future water shortages are a distinct probability. The number and intensity of wildfires is increasing. Drought, fire and water shortages create uncertainties for agriculture.
- **Growth and Development.** There is a lack of support for planning here. Promoting controlled growth is vital to keeping the area going. In order to do this we have to have a good growth plan. Wenatchee is running out of land, but there is land for redevelopment. It will continue to grow but in new ways, and better utilization of space will drive revitalization of the city. There is large amount of housing development happening on the east side of the river. The question for East Wenatchee is how do we grow the city in a good way?
- **Transportation.** Transportation is a big issue. There are limited “ins and outs” for the area. Addressing transportation issues is a challenge. Link Transit has been challenged by the 2000 State defunding of transportation/transit.
- **Governance and Leadership.** We need to focus on the elimination of duplication and competition in government and decision-making. “Silos” are our biggest obstacle. There is still a general distrust, some of which goes back to the Town Toyota Center imbroglio. There is a culture here that someone else will fix our problems, which defies what has been accomplished here historically. We are not long-term in our thinking. Short-term vision and lack of leadership dominate here. There is a need for our leadership to align with the community’s vision and values. The “masters” of the system are on their way out, but newer leaders are not ready to step up.

4. What is your vision for the future of the Wenatchee Valley?

- We are an extraordinary world-class community with a strong economy, compassionate social services, arts and entertainment, and a balanced approach.
- We are a healthy community – economically, socially, physically.
- We see ourselves as one community on both sides of the river.
- We live here together and make room enough for all of us.
- We coordinate provision of public services so that equity is as important as efficiency.
- We address poverty in all its manifestations, including in our schools.
- We solve homelessness adopting such programs as “housing first” initiatives.
- We have “upstream,” collaborative, preventive approaches to prevention of disease.
- We tackle our mental health issues, including drug addiction.
- We make a middle class life here possible.
- We are a more educated region.
- We bring in charter schools so that our schools get smarter.
- We establish a new four-year university or a satellite campus of an existing university.
- We establish our medical hospital as a teaching hospital.
- We promote joint economic development.

- We promote industrial growth, such as agricultural science and peripheral industries.
- We want companies to look at us and say this is a place where they want to be.
- We work to create solid, middle income jobs for the long term future.
- We make it easier for people in their mid-income earning years to remain in the community.
- We develop a higher level of capacity with diverse, smart people, and build on that capacity.
- We build on and benefit from our proximity to Seattle's economic success (e.g., recruiting businesses from Seattle's tech sector).
- We embrace the new economy, while recognizing our agricultural heritage. (Like Walla Walla.)
- We build on our inexpensive power and fast connectivity.
- We attract industries and workers that take advantage of our fiber optic network.
- We grow our tourism industry.
- We grow our arts and culture, wine and food tourism, and outdoor recreation. We market these attractions.
- We rebrand ourselves as a "mountain town," tying our economy to our natural assets, lifestyle and quality of life. (We name our canyons!)
- We grow but do not lose our natural assets. (Like San Diego.)
- We balance growth and development with housing, jobs and new investment that is slow, steady and well planned.
- We become more urban in a way that turns our geographic limitations and inability to sprawl into a natural advantage.
- We are a denser, more urban place that invests in transit and demand management.
- We better connect the riverfront to our cities.
- We improve our 'gateways' and have a major attractor.
- We invest in community-wide infrastructure and enhancements. We identify specific improvements, communicate their benefits, and ask the community to fund them. (See Ft. Collins, Colorado's "Building Community Choices" process.)
- We act as one city and region, starting with our leaders and the influencers. (Like the Wenatchee Valley Chamber.)
- We build on opportunities to work together as one valley.
- We leverage our own wealth (agriculture, medical, technology) to build new opportunities. We develop a culture of contribution.
- We develop citizenship among our refuge and immigrant populations, promoting greater engagement and volunteerism.
- We connect with our Hispanic community and motivate their engagement in the community.
- We foster and promote Latino leadership in our community.
- We integrate all of our social and economic systems with an eye to upward social mobility, both horizontally (between our Anglo and Latino communities) and vertically (within all levels of businesses, government, and civic organizations).
- We develop a sense of legacy, stewardship and leadership.