

Sustainability Focus Group Summary

October 15, 2024

General Themes

Transit and Density Trade-offs

- **Transit Investment Disparities:** Not all corridors are equal—Washtenaw, Plymouth, and State are prioritized for Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), while others like Miller may not support the same level of investment despite increased density.
- **Parking vs. Density:** Public support for density often falters when parking is discussed. Holding both perspectives side-by-side may help clarify trade-offs.
- **Navigability for Visitors:** Out-of-town visitors, especially those seeking medical services, face challenges navigating the city.
- **Trade-offs and Equity:** There's general support for goals, but specifics (e.g., parking, tree removal, density) reveal tensions. Some suggest prioritizing impacts on more privileged groups when trade-offs are necessary.

Resilience and Carbon Neutrality

- **Resilience Hubs:** Interest in integrating resilience hubs into planning, especially in light of Ann Arbor's A2Zero carbon neutrality goals.
- **Clarity in Language:** "Reducing carbon emissions" is seen as vague—participants want more specific, actionable language and strategies.

Neighborhoods & Mobility

- **Transit and Active Modes:** Interest in how walkability and transit integrate with biking and e-biking infrastructure.
- **School of Choice Impacts:** School choice increases car trips, undermining neighborhood walkability. Schools are seen as central to neighborhood identity.
- **Public Land for Housing:** Suggestions to collaborate with AAPS on using school land (e.g., Pioneer) for housing or funding through land sales.
- **Youth Mobility:** Middle schools lack transit access; ideas include improving bike infrastructure and creating safe routes to encourage independence.
- **Transit and Density:** Transit ridership is driven by density—housing, employment, and student populations are key.

Infrastructure & Services

Street Priorities

- **Transit Efficiency:** High-frequency buses (e.g., Washtenaw) are still stuck in traffic—BRT requires dedicated lanes, which means reallocating road space.
- **Vision Zero:** Safety should be a core strategy, with sidewalks seen as essential infrastructure despite implementation challenges.
- **Parking Culture:** Reducing parking availability may be necessary to shift behavior, though it requires cultural change.
- **Regional Transit:** Desire for regional coordination to connect employment centers and surrounding communities (e.g., Brighton, Saline, Chelsea).
- **Bike Network:** Questions about the extent and safety of bike infrastructure—some prefer BRT over bike lanes in constrained areas.
- **Clarifying Plans:** Need to align bike lane strategies with Vision Zero and clarify what the bike network entails.

Reduce Carbon Emissions

- **Building Efficiency:** Opportunities to reduce energy use through incentives, zoning changes, and expedited approvals for zero-emissions buildings.
- **Embodied Carbon:** Redevelopment should consider the carbon cost of demolishing and rebuilding structures.
- **District Energy:** Explore district energy systems (e.g., wastewater heat recovery) in high-transit areas.

Increase Community Resilience

- **Social Resilience:** Emphasis on social infrastructure and community cohesion as foundational to resilience.
- **Environmental Resilience:** Address environmental strategies (e.g., flood mitigation, green infrastructure) under infrastructure goals.

Key Questions & Considerations

- **Regional Transit:** How are regional transit needs and agency coordination being integrated into planning?
- **University of Michigan Growth:** What role does U-M's expansion play in shaping city infrastructure and housing needs?
- **Trade-offs in Planning:** How can the city navigate competing priorities (e.g., transit vs. bike lanes, density vs. green space) while maintaining equity and sustainability?