



## WALNUT HILLS LISTENING SESSION SUMMARY

March 18, 2019

6:30-8:00 PM

Bush Recreation Center (2640 Kemper Ln, Cincinnati, OH 45206)

Facilitated and compiled by Design Impact

### SUMMARY

The Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County hosted their first listening session for the Walnut Hills branch on March 18, 2019. Roughly 37 community members participated in the session.

The listening session at Bush Recreation Center is part of the Next Generation Library Initiative, which includes community engagement to gather input on their upcoming Facilities Master Plan. The library is concurrently addressing critical needs at branches in Price Hill, Walnut Hills, and Madisonville to address ADA accessibility.

The community engagement session is the first of several community engagement sessions to share feedback and learn about the Walnut Hills branch renovations. The Walnut Hills branch was built in 1906 and has never been renovated. The branch also purchased an adjacent lot for further expansion. Construction is estimated to begin in 2020.

During the session, attendees shared feedback at interactive stations and small group discussion. Participants shared their visions of what they wanted to see in Walnut Hills, generated a list of their community's assets, strengths, and skills, and discussed what they liked about the library as well as aspects they wanted to change and barriers to using the library. The full notes from the event can be found [here](#).

### PRIORITIES AND KEY IDEAS

- Celebrating the character of the community – Walnut Hills is proud of its socioeconomic and racial diversity. The historical community is also home to a myriad of artists, small businesses, civic groups, social groups, and associations like the Federation of Colored Women's Clubs, the Walnut Hills Historical Society, and the local chess meet up at the McDonald's. The community loves that the library customers reflect the neighborhood. Attendees want to keep the "heart and soul" of the library.
- Kid-friendly – Walnut Hills cares deeply about youth in the neighborhood and loved that the library offers a safe place for kids. The library is kid-friendly and has a great selection of children's books.
- Separate spaces for different customer needs – Participants saw even more potential to use the different spaces for the public since the library serves a wide range of ages. Ideas included quiet reading and study areas and separate spaces for young children to play, spaces for movement, computer areas, and modern meeting spaces.
- Increased ADA accessibility - including elevators, handrails on the steps, a book drop closer to the street (customers currently have to walk up steps to drop off books), and accessible meeting rooms



- Open outdoor spaces - Attendees saw potential to expand the library “beyond the two front doors” by integrating more outdoor green space. They wanted to see improved landscaping and new elements like living green walls. Outdoor spaces are also an important part of the community; attendees saw Eden Park, Green Man Park, and Civic Garden Center as important places in the community and listed gardening as one of the community’s many skills and assets.
- Public safety and walkability – Community members wanted to see more lights in the entrance area to increase safety. Many people also said that the traffic intersection in front of the library is dangerous; this intersection is a barrier that keeps some residents from using the library. Adding a bus stop in front of the library will increase community access. Finally, residents appreciated the police presence at the branch; the police had good relationships with customers, including teens, and made people feel safe.
- Renovate underutilized spaces - including historic stage area in the basement and the building’s third floor. The community was also excited about the recent land acquisition and were excited to brainstorm possibilities for the new space.
- Programming for young families – residents saw an opportunity to offer more activities and programming to attract young families as the neighborhood continues to grow, including preschool programming
- The historic architecture – One community member described the library as having “beautiful bones.” Attendees enjoyed the building’s historic interior and exterior elements, including the building’s stained glass and domed ceiling, woodwork, and limestone carvings.
- Warm, comfortable spaces – The library’s windows, natural light, and high ceilings make the space feel comfortable; people also wanted to see more color in the interior and new, comfortable furniture. One resident hoped the renovations wouldn’t turn the library into a “big red box,” or a generic cookie-cutter building.
- Facilities upgrades – included more parking, additional upgraded bathrooms, improved lighting, and more power outlets.
- Friendly staff – Walnut Hills staff are described as welcoming, helpful, and wear a lot of hats (social services, childcare, etc.).
- Art and creative spaces – Walnut Hills has a strong artist community and several studio spaces like Core Clay. Ideas to celebrate and leverage the neighborhood’s flourishing arts community included podcast studios, partnerships with Cincy Stories, spoken word programming, a multigeneration art zone for creative activities, a makerspace, and a rotating art gallery to exhibit local artists’ work.
- Access to fresh food – Walnut Hills has been a food desert since the neighborhood’s only grocery store closed. Attendees saw the library as an opportunity to fill that gap with ideas like a kitchen space for programming, grocery pick up station, and food trucks in the nearby Kroger parking lot.

