

## **COBI Elected Official Interviews**

### **Healthy Community Check-up**

**5-08-08**

During the period from April 15 – 23, 2008, interviews were conducted with the following City of Bainbridge Island Council members: Bill Knobloch, Barry Peters, Chris Snow, Hilary Franz, and Kim Brackett. An interview was conducted with the Mayor on May 7, 2008. The interviews were conducted by Bonnie Snedeker, consultant to HHHS on the Healthy Community Check-up project. Results are summarized below.

**Overall Focus:** The focus of the interviews was the work underway on the Healthy community Check-up. While each of the elected officials interviewed expressed interest and enthusiasm for this subject, the interviews were overshadowed by concerns about the financial crisis facing the City, caused by worsening revenue shortfalls and a trajectory of continued increases in expenditures. Council members were understandably preoccupied with this situation and tended to speculate throughout the interviews on causes, possible repercussions and potential solutions to this dilemma.

**Human Services a Priority:** To a person, the elected officials were familiar with HHHS and volunteered that they personally viewed human services and the work of HHHS as important priorities. They had recently been briefed on the results of the COBI survey (the “scientific” telephone sample, rather than the online survey) and reported that *human services* had emerged among the top priorities – above a number of other basic services and functions.

**Healthy Community Vision:** Council members and the Mayor were given a chance to review the healthy community vision from the comp plan. The vision statement, as it has with others in the community, seemed to resonate with the Council members. “Most people on Bainbridge really subscribe to that value”, said one.

“I think it is extremely important”, said another. “My wife and I chose Bainbridge Island because it seemed like a real community where we could connect and make a contribution.” A third Council member said, “I think that statement and its emphasis on the *wellbeing* of all community members really speaks to the fundamental goal of government – what people really care about.” The Mayor said: “This vision really *is* what matters and what should matter in government decisions. It’s all about community.”

**Assets:** When talking about what factors contribute to a “healthy community” environment on Bainbridge, most Council members mentioned human services in general and the role that HHHS plays specifically. “The City has done well in this area (human services) because of HHHS and the role it has played in supporting human services organizations, promoting coordinated delivery of services and addressing needs.” Other organizations mentioned in the

interviews included: Helpline House, Bainbridge Youth Services, Senior Center and Interfaith Caregivers. “I recognize the importance of the faith community on the Island when it comes to social justice and addressing human needs.” Other (non-human service related) assets mentioned in the interview included: community events, local newspaper and television station, quality school systems and an “open city government that encourages community participation – even though we don’t seem to get much credit for it.” The Mayor spoke enthusiastically about the value of HHHS and the quality of the HHHS board members.

**Threats:** Council members were concerned that City revenue restrictions would reduce resources available for human services at the same time that needs will be escalating because of the economic downturn and housing crisis. “We will see an increasing gap between the ‘haves’ and have-nots.” Several Council members seemed to feel that, at least in the short-term, *all* services will be adversely affected. “We may need to rely on more volunteers and more community contributions, rather than an increased role for City government.” Others pledged to do all they could to maintain support for human services – through HHHS: “Human service is something we can’t afford to fail at.” “These needs are like basic infrastructure needs. City funding is an important validator for the non-profits.” “I’d like to see us do *more* for human services and affordable housing. I do not want this community to become an enclave of the affluent.”

**Community Indicators:** When the discussion turned to community indicators, Council members seemed to agree that HHHS should focus on specific measures that emphasize continuing needs for health, housing and human services. “Evidencing need” was how one Council member put it. “Are there documented increases in people presenting themselves for help? Find indicators that help tell the story and make the case for human services.” Another Council member stressed the importance of anecdotes and sharing stories of how different Islanders have benefitted from human services. Most of these comments seem to be driven by the concern that continued support for human services will need to be driven by both an awareness of importance of these services as a community value and *asset*, as well as a documentation of *gaps or unmet needs*. (This reflects the way the City survey was constructed – with importance and satisfaction indices.) Several Council members dream of using indicators more broadly in the future as a way to gauge and monitor community well-being across a range of areas. But nobody seemed to think that movement toward broader use of community indicators was likely in the immediate future.

The Mayor had a somewhat different “take” on the concept of community indicators: “Yes, we may in flux as regards the budget. But it’s important to identify what people care about most – what is most important to preserve as our community grow and changes – and to start tracking and measuring those things on a consistent basis. We should do this whether times are good or bad.” She mentioned that this was a direction in which the new City Administrator was

interested in going. “If HHHS moves ahead to identify indicators for human services, this can serve as a model. HHHS has great credibility and can help set the tone for broader work with community indicators.

**Next Steps:** Council members were very interested in our research findings and how they might fit with and augment the results of the City surveys and other efforts, such as Parks and Open Space surveys. Several people seemed concerned that we work together and take the time needed to analyze, share and review the wealth of community responses that are being generated across these efforts. Hilary Franz expressed a desire to create a “cross-survey processing work group”, as well as issuing an invitation for HHHS to come back to the CRC for a presentation and discussion of our final results.

The Mayor was also interested in following up. She was enthusiastic about the idea of HHHS coming back to the CRC this summer and expressed her intention to ask if she could be present to participate. She was interested in exploring how the Healthy Community findings might be used in helping to establish the criteria that will be used to set the matrix for capital project decisions. She also mentioned the possibility of a presentation of Healthy Community Check-up Findings at the “inter-governmental” group (Parks/Fire/School/Library/City) at its July meeting. A further thought was the possibility of a staff workshop at City Hall to delve further into the findings across the various surveys that have been fielded this spring (e.g. City budget priorities; Parks; Open Space, etc.)