



**City of Sammamish  
Community Center Focus Group Research**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

*June, 2011*

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# Table of Contents

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Research Goal and Objectives ..... 3

Research Methodology ..... 4

Respondent Profile ..... 5

Awareness of City of Sammamish Projects ..... 6

Important Attributes in a Community Center ..... 7

Location Selection ..... 9

Lake Washington School District Property Site ..... 11

SE 4<sup>th</sup> Street Site ..... 12

Kellman Site ..... 13

All Sites ..... 14

Conclusion ..... 15



# Research Goal and Objectives

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## Research Goal

The goal of this research was to evaluate the perceptions and opinions of City of Sammamish residents in regard to the construction and location of a potential new community center.

## Research Objectives

The following objectives were addressed in this research:

1. Determined awareness of any new community facilities the City of Sammamish has been managing or planning.
2. Assessed the awareness of the City of Sammamish's Community Center Feasibility Research.
3. Identified what the most important features are in a community center among participants.
4. Identified the types of events participants would like offered at a community center.
5. Evaluated how frequently the community center would be used and what specifically for.
6. Evaluated three potential locations for the community center:
  - a. The Lake Washington School District Property Site
  - b. The SE 4<sup>th</sup> Street Site
  - c. The Kellman Site
7. Determined the benefits and negatives of each site.
8. Assessed which site is the preferred choice among the participants.
9. Evaluated the level of support for a new community center.
10. Determined how likely participants and their families would be to use the new community center.

# Research Methodology

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## **Focus Group Process and Research Documentation**

Jim Hebert, President of Hebert Research, moderated the focus group and the data collection staff of Hebert Research recruited the focus group participants.

## **Focus Group Location**

The focus group was held on June 9<sup>th</sup>, 2011 at 6:00 p.m. at the City of Sammamish City Hall.

## **Sampling Frame**

Participants of the focus group were all residents of the City of Sammamish.

## **Research Team**

Members of the research team included:

- Jim Hebert, President and Senior Research Director, Hebert Research
- Cynthia Hebert, COO and Senior Research Director, Hebert Research
- Bret Bittenob, Research Analyst, Hebert Research
- Jay Jolisin, IT Manager, Hebert Research
- Michael Wasnock, Programmer, Hebert Research

## Respondent Profile

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All of the 12 participants in the focus group were from the City of Sammamish and the majority have lived in Sammamish for ten years or more. Participants in the focus group were all between the ages of 35 and 63 with the highest frequency of the participants in their 40's. Many of the participants have children and all reported that they were very active. Hobbies among the participants included: golfing, hiking, skiing, boating, stationary bike, as well as frequent exercise. Participants also reported that they belong to health and fitness clubs, with the majority mentioning the YMCA.

## Awareness of City of Sammamish Projects

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### City of Sammamish Projects

Participants were first asked on an unaided basis if they were aware of any new community facilities the City of Sammamish has been planning or managing. Participants were aware of several new community facilities, with the most frequently mentioned being the YMCA. This was attributable to the fact that the YMCA sent out a letter to residents of Sammamish informing them of the new development. Participants also reported that they were aware of the following:

- New Boys and Girls Club
- Swedish Club
- New park by Skyline
- Town Center
- Aquatic Center
- Community Center

### Community Center Feasibility Study

Next, participants were asked if they were aware of the City of Sammamish Community Center Feasibility Study. All of the respondents with the exception of one reported that they were aware of the new community center plans. This knowledge primarily came from the local City of Sammamish newspaper, "The Sammamish Review." Specifically, participants were aware that a new community center is under consideration and preliminary estimates for the costs and location of the community center had been developed. Participants also discussed the community center's link to the aquatic center, and stated that some of the plans include a pool and some do not. In regard to the aquatic center, one participant referred to the community center as a "given" when referring to the community center, indicating the community center would need to be built in order to house the pools. The remainder of the group echoed this sentiment.

### Analysis

Participants were highly aware of the projects the City of Sammamish has undertaken. It is clear that the participants are highly engaged with their City and like to be informed of the direction the City of Sammamish is taking. Also important to note is the readership level of the "Sammamish Review." This particular community newspaper is a key source of information about the City's community activities. It is important to note that participants were well aware of the new community center discussion and had read the article regarding the potential development of the community center in the most recent addition of the newspaper.

# Important Attributes in a Community Center

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## Important Features

Participants were then asked to describe what features are most important to them in a community center. The first statement made which the rest of the group was in consensus with was:

- *"It [the community center] needs to support all ages, from newborns to senior citizens."*

This was very important to the group specifically because if a new community center is going to be built, everyone in the city should have equal opportunity to enjoy it.

Additionally, participants reported that they would like to see meeting rooms and gathering areas for people to get together and play cards, games or simply socialize with one another. As one participant stated, which the rest of the group agreed with:

- *"Having a place to meet and mingle is great."*

It was clear from the group's responses that a new community center in Sammamish should place a large emphasis on gathering areas for socialization. This is also attributable because of the growth of the City and an expected increase in the percentage of families in Sammamish.

Participants unanimously agreed that the community center should place an emphasis on health conscious activities. This would include having weight rooms, a cardio room, fitness classes and other physical activities. Currently, approximately half of the participants reported that they do belong to a gym or fitness center, but agreed that they would be likely to use the new community center and more importantly, that others in the community would be too. A statement made by one participant reflected the attitude of the entire group:

- *"Not everyone can afford to belong to a club."*

The general consensus among the group is that it is imperative that the community center includes these features so that the whole community has the ability to enjoy them.

Finally, participants stressed the point that the community center should not be focused on one or just a few activities, agreeing that if this were the case, the community center could not be enjoyed by all residents.

- *"Defining and understanding the purpose of the community center is important."*
- *"It will not be a community center if it [the community center] is too focused on one thing."*

## Events/Programs

As a follow up, participants were asked to what types of events and programs they would like to see offered at the community center. First mentioned were youth programs at the

community center, such as sports, day camps and even child care/day care. Participants with children agreed that day camps would be valuable, especially since they are extremely popular in the Sammamish area. For childcare, participants were in consensus that childcare should only be allowed to parents who are staying and using the community center, not as a place to drop children off.

Adult programs were another area discussed by participants. Participants agreed that these would encourage socialization and bring the community closer together. Additionally, for many physical fitness classes, participants agreed that a fee could be charged and in most cases, insurance would cover the cost.

The discussion of adult classes led to the topic of the swimming pool. One participant mentioned that it is often frustrating when at a swimming pool to find an area for swimming laps, since pools are mainly used for recreation. The rest of the group agreed that if a pool is to be included, there needs to be a reserved area for swimming laps at specified times. Additionally, participants discussed the possibility of swim teams using the pool and agreed that this should be supported. However, participants did agree that if too many programs are included, the community center can become too difficult to use for those not participating in programs.

Participants also discussed how the community center could be used to generate revenue. Specific events mentioned included:

- Weddings
- Birthdays
- Sports leagues
- Adult classes
- Rehabilitation classes

### **Analysis**

It was highly important to participants that a new community center is all inclusive and offers events and activities for all residents of the City. Additionally, participants want traditional events and activities offered such as fitness classes and swimming, but also placed an emphasis on using the community center as a source of revenue by hosting events. Ultimately, participants want the community center to be a point of convergence and provide a sense of belongingness to residents of Sammamish.

## Location Selection

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### **Unaided Selection of Community Center Site**

Respondents were then asked on an unaided basis, where they would prefer a new community center to be located. The first site mentioned by the respondents was “right here” referring to the property behind the City Hall. Participants had strong support for the location because the City of Sammamish already owns the property.

Additionally, participants stated that wherever the community center is to be built, there would need to be “easy access.” Participants are concerned that there potentially could be an added burden to the roadways and that more traffic lights would have to be installed.

The group unanimously agreed that they would not want to travel to a community center and joked that “I don’t want it [the community center] in Redmond.” However, many of the participants did report that they have been to the Issaquah community center, mainly because it is in fairly close proximity.

### **Initial Selection of the Three Sites**

Respondents were then shown a PowerPoint slide with all three of the potential locations and asked to select which one they would prefer. The initial reaction by one participant was the Lake Washington School District Site. This was primarily due to “concern about the access to the other two [properties].” The rest of the group agreed that the Lake Washington site appeared to be easily accessible. One concern participants had about the Lake Washington School District Site was the size of the wetlands and how that would impact the construction.

Other participants liked the Kellman property because of the proximity to City Hall. However, one participant was concerned about what would happen to the fireworks on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July. Another attribute participants noted about Kellman was the fact children already play there and it is convenient if parents wanted to go into the library or City Hall.

The SE 4<sup>th</sup> property was initially seen as “too far away” and did not receive a lot of debate. One of the concerns with the property was that parents would not trust their children to walk to the community center if they were at City Hall or the library.

Participants also had concerns about the zoning of the sites and how it would affect the cost of construction. This was another important finding as the majority of the group was aware that the City of Sammamish already owns the Kellman property and would not have to purchase additional land if the community center were to be constructed.

**Analysis**

Access was one of the primary concerns participants had when discussing where the community center should be located. Initially, the Lake Washington School District site was seen as somewhat accessible, but upon further discussion, the group agreed that the Kellman Site would be the most convenient. Participants unanimously agreed that the site must provide easy in and out access to all residents without placing too much of a burden on traffic through the city.

## Lake Washington School District Property Site

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Next, participants were shown a series of slides for each of the three potential sites. After being shown the slides for a property, participants were then asked to identify what stood out to them, the benefits and the negatives of each site. The first site evaluated was the Lake Washington School District property. The first thing participants discussed was the negative of sharing an access road with high school students. This was their primary concern and one participant stated, "I can't see why Eastside Catholic would want to do this." Participants also discussed how this would impact the usage of the site, particularly during school times where there was concern of the high school students parking in the community center lot.

In regard to the features of the community center, participants also had concerns about the size of the swimming pool and if it would be regulation size for events. In addition, the space of the two gyms was an issue and one participant had concerns that it would not be large enough to accommodate events such as teen dances.

### **Analysis**

The Lake Washington School District Property Site ultimately became the least preferred choice among participants. The location and access were the primary deterrents as well the parking difficulties participants agreed would arise if the community center were to be built at this location.

## SE 4<sup>th</sup> Street Site

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The SE 4<sup>th</sup> Street site was more attractive to the participants than was the Lake Washington School District site. One of the primary reasons was in and out access to the site. Participants agreed that this road has the potential to provide better access and has been proven to handle large volumes of traffic when used as a recent detour for Southeast 228<sup>th</sup> Street. However, the group did agree that the road would still need improvements and most likely need to be widened.

The primary benefit of this site among the participants was the potential for the town center to be developed around the community center. One participant stated the following which the rest of the group agreed with:

- *“If the town center is developed, you could drop your children off [at the community center] and go and use the retail area.”*

Participants also liked that this site would be close to City Hall and that trails could be taken between the town center and community center to City Hall.

- *“If the community center happens, it would be nice if it is integrated with the town center.”*

One participant even commented on the construction of the site and noted that the existing grade could be a positive.

- *“Works to building advantage when there is that existing grade.”*

However, participants did have concerns about the location of the site, primarily since no one knows for sure if the town center will ever be developed. In addition, participants also stated that there is already existing shopping nearby, most notably Redmond. One participant also stated that she is concerned that it would get in the way of park property.

At the conclusion of the discussion, one participant stated the following indicating that even though the town center may never be developed, it does not mean that the location of the community center depends on it.

- *“You can’t let the perfect get in the way of the good.”*

### **Analysis**

The potential for a new town center was the primary reason why participants found this site to be appealing. However, with no guarantee of the town center being constructed, participants became more likely to favor the Kellman site. Additionally, participants had a difficult time seeing the connection between having the community center located at the same site as the town center.

## Kellman Site

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Although when shown the slides participants did not discuss the Kellman site as much as the previous two, it was primarily due to the fact they found less negatives associated with the site. The group agreed that the location was ideal next to the City Hall. Initially, the group's concern had to do with the availability of parking, but once they saw the plans for the structured parking complex, the concern diminished.

Participants also admire the views from City Hall and agreed that if the new community center were able to retain those views, especially from the second level, that this would be another benefit to the Kellman site.

- *"If walking on an indoor track, it would be nice to have a view."*

However, the group agreed that these views would not be a necessity.

The group also liked that other City buildings are centrally located, and as mentioned previously in the group, if parents wanted to visit the library or use the community center, their children could still use the outside basketball courts, skate park or the community center as well. Participants were also relieved to find out that the Kellman site construction would not interfere with the Commons Park.

The main concern with the Kellman site continued to be the access. Participants were concerned about the effects on traffic it would have and how everyone would get in and out of the complex.

### Analysis

It was clear that the Kellman site was the preferred choice among participants. Having the site next to City Hall was seen as a benefit and the group was in consensus that it just feels like the right place to have the community center. Participants also agreed that if a new town center were to be constructed at the SE 4<sup>th</sup> Street site, that community center users would still be able to easily access the town center as well as the City Hall and the library.

## All Sites

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At the conclusion, participants were shown the all of the slides briefly one last time and then asked to summarize their opinions and perceptions towards each. They were as follows:

### Lake Washington Property Site

- “At first I really liked it, now it is the worst [of the three options].”
- Too far away from City Hall
- Too close to Eastside Catholic
- Would not be close enough to the potential town center
- No sidewalks on Southeast 228<sup>th</sup> Street or trails to connect to the other two potential sites
- The City facilities would be too spread out
- Remote from other city functions
- Parking from the high school would overflow into the community center

### SE 4<sup>th</sup> Street

- It would be closer to City Hall
- Trails could connect to City Hall
- Could be an investment in the future with the addition of the town center
- Parking could be an issue if the town center were to be built
- Spreading the City facilities out is not a good thing
- Being adjacent to the Commons Park is a good thing
- The increase in traffic would be a problem
- Concern with what variety would be at the town center and fear it would turn into another strip mall
- Difficulty understanding the connection the community center has to the town center

### Kellman

- Close to City Hall
- Close to the Library
- Easier and more access
- The space already has a community center feel with many positive activities for children
- Possibility of still being able to walk to a potential town center at SE 4<sup>th</sup> Street site
- Limited expansion opportunities not perceived as a large issue

## Conclusion

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At the conclusion of the group, participants were asked to select their preferred site location for a potential new community center. The group unanimously selected the Kellman site as their first choice, the SE 4<sup>th</sup> Street site as their second choice and the Lake Washington School District site as their least preferred choice. It is important to note that participants also understood that the square footage for each of the potential sites was very similar as was the construction costs.

It is also important to note that participants were eager to carry on the conversation at the conclusion of the group and agreed that they appreciated the efforts the City is making to include their opinions. The group also was interested to find out if there would be future research projects put on by the City of Sammamish.