



RAPP CONSULTING GROUP

Focus Group Overview:

As part of the City of Richland's strategic planning process, focus groups were conducted November 7th through November 10th, 2022. Summaries of the major themes discussed by focus groups are contained on the following pages. Participants were recruited by City staff.

Focus Group Process:

A focus group is a small-group discussion guided by a trained facilitator. It is used to gather in-depth information about a community's thoughts and opinions on a specific topic. The interaction enables participants to ask questions of each other, as well as to re-evaluate and reconsider their own understandings of their specific experiences. The facilitator's role is to gather information in an impartial and confidential manner, manage the pace of the discussion, and ensure that everyone has a chance to participate.

The process typically includes a set of questions and follow-up discussion within the small group. The group meets for a limited duration. In the case of Richland's focus groups, the discussion topics were strengths and challenges for the city. The meetings ran for approximately 90 minutes and participants were recruited by city staff. At the conclusion of each focus group, each participant was asked to identify three areas for the City to focus efforts and resources on over the next five years. This structure requires participants to prioritize their thoughts in a succinct manner and may provide a summary of key strategic issues to be considered using the qualitative data from the rest of the report.

Focus Group Context within the Strategic Planning Process

The main purpose of focus group research is to draw upon respondents' attitudes, feelings, beliefs, experiences, and reactions in a way that complements other data collection methods such as surveys or one-to-one interviews. These attitudes, feelings and beliefs may be partially independent of a group or its social setting but are more likely to be revealed via the social gathering and the interaction which being in a focus group entails. Focus groups help to generate qualitative data that identify general themes of importance to the community.

Focus Group Questions/Areas of Exploration:

A broad set of questions were developed to guide the focus group discussions. The questions are listed below. The questions provided areas to explore rather than a strict outline to follow. Follow-up

questions were asked during each session based upon the answers given to explore the answer or issue more deeply.

1. When you think of what you like best about the City, what comes to mind?
2. When you think about Richland as compared to other suburban communities, what comes to mind about the challenges of this community?
3. What are the disadvantages of living in Richland as compared to other places?
4. What are the advantages of living in Richland as compared to other places?
5. If you could change things about Richland what would they be?
6. When you think about all of the things the City does, what are the most important to you?
7. Of the important roles that the City plays in helping to create a good quality of life, what are the most important to maintaining or creating a high-quality future?
8. If you could choose three things for the City to focus efforts and resources on over the next five years, what would they be?

Focus Group Participants:

<u>DATE</u>	<u>TIME</u>	<u>GROUP</u>
Monday, November 7th	6:00 - 7:30 pm	Quality of Life (1)
Tuesday, November 8th	10:00 - 11:30 am	Economic Development
Tuesday, November 8th	6:00 - 7:30 pm	Boards, Commissions, Committees Chairs
Wednesday, November 9th	1:00 - 2:30 pm	Quality of Life (2)
Wednesday, November 9th	6:00 - 7:30 pm	New Residents
Thursday, November 10th	6:00 - 7:30 pm	Long Term Residents

Summary of Major Themes:

Public safety: Public safety was a major theme for the focus groups. Although many participants feel that they are safe now, there are concerns that with growth that will change. Neighboring cities are seeing more crime and there is concern that it may come to Richland. Panhandling is more visible and now there are people outside of all the major stores. Overall response times are good, and public safety personnel are friendly and helpful.

The challenges in recruiting police officers may make it hard to maintain the current safety levels, and there were discussions about increased vandalism and park bathrooms needing to be locked because of vandalism and drug use. Several participants mentioned that it seems like there are less officers for speeding and traffic control, and theft of catalytic converters have been rising. One group discussed the issues in other area cities such as Seattle and noted that their problems started with litter and graffiti and grew from there. As a result, they see it as important to take care of the small problems before the

grow into big problems. Richland is seen as safer than other places, but not as safe as it was in the past and should be now. An increase in violent crimes, including murder, in the Tri-Cities in general and Richland specifically was discussed at several groups.

Mental health and the impact on public safety were mentioned by two groups. While there is some mental health assistance available, more is needed. Additionally, two groups discussed the need for a substance abuse facility.

Traffic/Speeding: Speeding was an issue discussed at length in several groups. Speed limits on residential streets should be lower according to many participants. One group discussed the speed limit on Thayer as being at 30 mph, it should be at 25 mph, and teens regularly drive on it at 40-45 mph. The number of fatal auto accidents has increased in Richland, and recently there were sixteen severe injury crashes. Most of the crashes happen in central Richland, where middle school students cross the street.

George Washington Way can be a “mess” of people commuting and speeding. Lack of public transportation not only leads to additional cars on the road, but also parking issues and more public transportation is needed. The Transportation board does not have a single bus rider on it and having a diversity of perspectives is needed.

Slow trains also impact traffic. While participants realized that the city has no control over the condition of the tracks they did note the negative impact on traffic.

Economic development: Participants noted that there used to be a lot of chain restaurants but now there are locally owned restaurants as well which is an improvement. A concern is how early restaurants close, which makes it difficult for people who work late. Richland “shuts down at 8 pm” and that impacts the number of young people who want to be here. Many participants discussed that if Richland wants to retain young people and stop the “brain drain”, there needs to be an urbanistic lifestyle where amenities are within walking distance. Several groups noted that mixed-use developments would allow for a more urban feel and help with both the housing issues by incorporating more high-density housing and also provide a steady supply of customers for the businesses and restaurants from area residents.

“Downtown” was discussed by several groups, with some different perspectives. Some identified the parkway as being downtown-ish and wanted more of an emphasis on development in the central/core Richland area. Many wanted to create a mixed-use development with retail, restaurants and housing that would have a downtown-like appeal. Others thought that there was no place for a true downtown, and so there was no need to try and create one.

Several participants discussed that more tourism would bring additional money to the area but Richland need amenities to make that happen. Events like Holiday Lights are great, but more are needed and should be publicized with an annual schedule. The Farmer’s Market is great and brings a lot of people into central Richland.

There were several challenges noted. Zoning requirements are seen as out of date, especially parking requirements, and that impact the affordability of infill development. The business group noted that the building and planning department are a challenge to work with and simple remodels that would help businesses cannot be done because of the associated road upgrades the city requires as part of the project. One participant decided not to do a remodel on a commercial kitchen because of the cost of

the additional road upgrades required. Better dialogue is needed according to participants, along with reasonable expectations about what businesses can do. There seems to be no flexibility, and one participant noted that “either you write the check, or you don’t”. Several participants said that it would be helpful to have someone identified as a business advocate, to help businesses work with the city.

Parking is an issue according to several participants, particularly for restaurants and taverns to be successful. They noted that in some places there is not enough parking and in others lots sit empty. They are concerned that there are many older buildings that are vacant, and instead of renovating those properties, new buildings are being built. Several groups identified central Richland as having properties that are vacant and unattractive. Many participants requested- no more storage places please! Some said that Kennewick is better for business, and in general most participants said the city needs to work to bring businesses to Richland.

Schools: The schools are good, and the kids tend to have very educated parents who are involved in their education according to all of the groups. Because the local population is so educated, the high school has teachers with advanced education. The school district gets support from the community. It’s also an advantage to have WSU Tri-Cities because teachers can get their master’s degree, there are partnerships that make it a huge asset to the community. Having good schools is seen as one of the most important things for Richland by all groups. Some noted that there should be more trade schools available in the area to support different career paths, and there was concern about if the schools would be able to keep up with growth.

Public and private schools also work well together to provide services to kids, share use of facilities and more according to one group. That spirit of cooperation is unusual and appreciated since the focus is what is best for the kids.

City Services: The City of Richland has its own utilities, garbage, water etc., and all services come on one bill which is much better than having several separate taxing districts. However, water and electric meter reading should be updated so that a person is not needed to read it but it can be done remotely. Utilities should also be located above ground, and internet should be provided for everyone so that all have access to hi-tech infrastructure. Better recycling opportunities were also identified by one group as a need.

The parks are very well regarded. The city is clean and looks nice. Graffiti is taken care of right away, and water quality is good. The parks that are on the river are well utilized, but more bathrooms and bike parking are needed. The dog park is appreciated and is a popular amenity.

There were challenges identified as well. Zoning is seen by some as overly restrictive, especially for accessory dwelling units. A living unit above a garage cannot be built to allow for parents to live near family which was a frustration given the lack of affordable housing in Richland. However some of the codes that are in place are not being effectively monitored, such as restrictions on parking boats or RVs on the streets. Cars parking on the sidewalk, weeds, and people living in RVs were among the complaints.

There were concerns in a couple of groups regarding electric and the capability of Richland to support electric vehicles. Utilities are on the verge of a nuclear renaissance, and there are opportunities to attract new reactors. Some participants believe that Richland needs to attract that kind of business

activity. One participant had recently used a low percentage loan from the city to upgrade windows and noted that those kinds of programs can help residents with lower energy options and free up money for other projects. One suggestion was a low interest loan to install solar panels throughout the city. Not only would it help homeowners, but additional power generated can be provided to the city. Another group suggested that Richland should lead an energy program with nuclear energy, solar for both business and homeowners and wind energy.

Some participants felt that City departments are siloed in the way that they administer things, and there needs to be systems thinking, including more coordination between city departments and commissions. There needs to be city representatives at board and commission meetings and more staff support is needed. Additionally, several participants felt that communication with residents could be improved as there can be inconsistent communication on different channels.

Two groups discussed the possibility of merging with West Richland so that growth can be better supported rather than dividing resources between two communities.

Housing: The newer and more affluent subdivisions are seen as getting a “lot of love” while inner-city Richland has been on a downward trajectory. Many participants feel that code enforcement is lax in the area. There is concern about growing home prices and the lack of affordable housing and how that will impact recruitment for area companies. Most participants in several groups noted that mixed use developments would be most advantageous, allowing for both residential and commercial growth. All groups discussed concerns about the availability of housing for more than just the very wealthy in Richland, and that there is a “missing middle” of townhomes and other higher density, less expensive housing. Mixed use developments came up repeatedly as a solution to both the housing and retail/restaurant wish list. Encouraging developments that go vertical was suggested, including incentivizing taller buildings. Kennewick has done a good job of creating spaces for people to live, work, and enjoy life according to some participants, and there is the desire to see Richland do the same.

Zoning is seen as exclusionary at times, which impact the affordability of housing. Zoning needs to be changed to accommodate more creative housing solutions, and lot sizes currently negatively impact being able to subdivide a single-family home into a duplex or other configuration. With limited land available, zoning restrictions should be reevaluated. Flexibility is required when new developments come in, and a willingness to commit to a vision and not promise things that can't be delivered.

One group noted that the current diversity in housing stock led to some diversity in the community as there were multiple financial entry points for housing. However that leads to very different experiences in south Richland, as there were less opportunities for kids to safely walk and bike. There are also no stores nearby, resulting in resident experiences varying significantly between north and south Richland. There is 1% availability on rentals and very few homes to buy at any price point. One group noted that there are many kids who receive free or reduced lunches at school. A couple of groups discussed that there are two Richlands and one is really struggling financially. The inequality has grown since the pandemic.

There was also concern about how development is being handled. The Master Planned community (Badger Mountain South) has now changed with a new plat submitted to get rid of the civic space and the designated land instead used to create more housing. Land at the golf course may also now be developed, even though there is little support from residents for it. As one participant noted “There is

only one chance to get it right because land is at a premium". As land at the outskirts of Richland continues to be developed, there is also concern about how that will impact service delivery and if it will take away from the core Richland. There was discussion in several groups that infrastructure has to grow to match housing, and that tax dollars created should be looked at to make sure that it is supporting the growth. One group felt that although there was a lot of "red tape" there was effort with city staff to help to get the job done.

Homelessness was viewed differently by participants. Some noted that there are less here than in other cities, while others said that it is a growing problem. A couple of groups discussed that while it may not be as visible as it is in Portland and other cities, the natural areas have folks living in them, there are a lot of RVs, and individuals sleeping on sidewalks near campus. There are also a lot of kids on free or reduced lunch who come from families that are really struggling financially.

Infrastructure: Overall, infrastructure was seen as needing improvement. While some were aware of a five-year improvement plan, there was universal consensus that infrastructure improvements need to be prioritized now and not just in the future. Road conditions are a concern for many, with one group noting that although there is a list of roads to be fixed, it's a "really long list" and progress doesn't seem to be coming fast enough.

In general participants believe that traffic is getting worse, and they noted that most people must drive everywhere as Richland is not very walkable. Road conditions, sidewalks, signage and lights all look different depending on what part of town you are in, and that inconsistency should not exist. Road conditions should be fixed sooner, and there is concern about the damage to roadways from additional truck traffic. Several participants noted that roads and the ability to handle development are linked, and that better road conditions will help to spur development.

Snow removal is seen as not being as good in general, and in comparison to Pasco, snow removal is worse. As a result, roads don't feel safe during winter weather events. Snow dumps in central Richland takes a long time to melt, and the snow restricts traffic. Maintenance of sidewalks is the responsibility of the homeowner, and inconsistent maintenance causes issues for those who need to use the sidewalks when they are not clear. Additionally, sidewalks are needed on both sides of the street and in some areas, there aren't sidewalks on either side of the street. A couple of participants specifically noted that the lack of a safe sidewalks impact kids walking on Goethals Drive when coming home from school. Sidewalks need to be put into the older areas of Richland, right now they are only put in if the property owner installs it.

Some participants noted that while there are many paths for biking, they are not connected well as they could be. Additionally, bike paths should be constructed for those who want to bike to work and not commute by car. It's difficult at times to cross the highways by bike.

There are challenges that specifically impact people with disabilities in Richland. There are not enough cutouts in the sidewalks for wheelchairs, and handicapped parking spaces don't always access sidewalks near a cutout. The sidewalks need to be inventoried to make sure that they are ADA compliant.

Stormwater is not handled well, and when there is a lot of rain the storm sewers back up. Stop lights seem to not work well at times, causing long lines of traffic with no cross traffic present. The Jadwin

road project was challenging for residents since the road closed signs were unclear, leading to traffic snarls.

City/Area amenities: The river was a central theme of the groups and help to provide a sense of identity for Richland. Not only do residents enjoy boating on the river itself but also the many water sports that are available. “Everyone has a favorite spot” on the river.

One group noted that there are a lot of events where the community can come together, and it is free to participate. Some of these events are done by the city, others by other area organizations, and it benefits the whole community. Another group discussed the events but noted that they need to be better communicated to residents. They suggested an annual festival cycle be created and publicized so that everyone to look forward to upcoming events.

The parks were discussed by many participants, and overall they were described as well-kept and maintained and that residents feel safe and comfortable in the parks. Accessibility should be improved not only to the developed parks but also Badger Mountain. One group discussed the BMX track and noted that it is in a city park, so it is accessible to the public which is a great amenity. However more amenities like a multi-use sports fields for lacrosse, soccer, flag football, etc. would be appreciated.

Several groups discussed the library. It is described as having great programming for a variety of age groups and interests, and the building itself is welcoming. It is well utilized and people from other communities come to Richland to use the library because it is so good. The library is seen by some participants as the heart of the community because of the many different demographics reached and it could be a good partner for more coordinated outreach to the community. However, several groups mentioned that more than just one library branch is needed.

Two groups noted that a Children’s Museum would be a great addition and a complement to library programming. Another important support for young families is more capacity for childcare. Several participants in different groups noted that there is a long waiting list for a slot in area childcare centers.

Many participants noted that there are many activities in the area, from the parks system to Riverfront Park to the library. However, several participants noted that in comparison to other communities such as Bend, OR or Yakima that Richland is bigger but has less to do. There is no youth center in Richland, or amphitheater, water parks etc. Open slots for swimming lessons are filled in minutes and an aquatic center is needed. There needs to be more collaboration between the Tri-cities to bring amenities to the area regardless of which community will have the amenity in their jurisdiction.

The area theater group (Richland Players) is very inclusive and make it easy to get involved. However, there is the need for a performing arts center. Many travel to Spokane for city concerts, arts etc. and would like to have more cultural events available locally. The high school auditoriums are hard to book so a dedicated space is needed.

Participants were happy with the area medical care and note that there are a growing number of specialists, and the quality of the hospital has gotten better. However, there are waitlists for new doctors so more medical professionals are needed. Recent suicides among youth were discussed at length by two groups. They were concerned about the lack of services available for those who are struggling with mental health issues.

Collaboration between the Tri-Cities: Several groups noted the opportunities available with more collaboration between all three cities for larger projects. Zoning codes are very different between the cities, and that causes huge differences. Blanket zoning among the three cities would allow for better growth management. Coordination among the communities is needed, as well as the need to stop fighting over which city is going to get an amenity because any amenities benefit the region. As the three communities invest in cultural activities in different ways, such as having ice rinks or stadiums for concerts, joint planning for the benefit of the entire region would be advantageous. Overall, participants seemed to view themselves as part of the Tri-Cities region and not just Richland. The more expansive view of “community” made regional collaboration an important topic for many participants, as they imagined what could be done cooperatively. While no one suggested that services such as public safety be combined, there was a desire for amenities to be created for the benefit of the region and not just an individual city.

Collaboration is also desired through the different levels of government- schools, state, etc. There are natural resource issues that have to be addressed by multiple governing bodies. The demand for water is just going to increase, and water use needs to be addressed. Roads coming into the Tri-Cities will also need to be continually improved to address area growth. There are already too many accidents, and some roads need to be expanded now.

Several groups noted the spirit of volunteerism in Richland. The residents are generous and take care of many area issues through partnering with nonprofit organizations.

Three priorities for Richland:

At the conclusion of the focus groups, participants were asked, “If you could choose three things for the City to focus efforts and resources on over the next five years, what would they be?” After an hour of sharing ideas, perspectives and suggestions about a variety of topics, this question encourages participants to narrow the number of priorities to just the three that they feel are most important. Responses are tallied into the following categories:

Downtown/mixed use development (18)

- Build vertical
- Revitalize central Richland
- Renovate vacant buildings
- More parking needed

Economic development/jobs (2)

- Expand the job market
- Higher end retail (Nordstrom was an example given)

Growth (8)

- Better planning- more comprehensive and not just looking at things piece by piece
- Open space and natural resource protection

- Growth planning management
- Be cautious with growth

Public safety (15)

- Homelessness

Traffic/speeding (7)

- Lower speed limits

More mental health/social services/social issues (10)

- Youth mental health
- Social determinants of health

Affordable housing (13)

- Overhaul the zoning code- create “missing middle” housing
- High quality housing is essential
- diverse types of affordable housing for all age groups
- Rezone to allow for more dense housing especially in central Richland

Arts/performing arts/arts center (12)

Infrastructure (10)

- Roads need to keep up with growth
- Having transportation infrastructure for all users
- Streetlights should be updated to sustainable model

Parks (9)

- Park and rec facilities
- Indoor pool
- Multi-purpose fields

Walkability/bikeable/accessible (8)

- Retrofit streets for safety
- Better planning
- Multi-modal connectivity
- Need to make Richland friendly for people with disabilities

Collaboration (5)

- Tri-Cities partnership for big initiatives like civic spaces
- National Labs

- Nonprofit associations
- City council and staff more active in standing committees

Utilities (3)

- Develop a vision for energy development

Other (6)

- Education
- Community center
- Quality of life enforcement
- Code enforcement
- City services
- More focus groups

Conclusion:

Focus group participants stated they were appreciative of the opportunity to participate in the focus groups. There was vibrant conversation, with the exchange of opinions, perspectives, and ideas that at times allowed participants to look at issues from a new point of view. Many volunteered to participate in similar groups if they are held in the future as they were interested in a continuing role in charting the future of Richland.

Respectfully submitted,

Cory Poris Plasch