



Imagine Monroe Assessment Phase Summary

OVERVIEW

The purpose of the assessment phase of the Imagine Monroe Project was to develop a clear understanding of the Monroe community and a picture for what has been happening in the City since the last vision statement was adopted in 2015. The assessment phase also aimed to understand best practices for reaching Monroe's diverse community networks to make sure that the updated vision, mission and core values statements developed through the project are informed by a broad range of voices.

To achieve these objectives EnviroIssues completed a series of focus groups with long-term residents, new residents and Spanish-speaking residents, and conducted one-on-one interviews with community partners working in City government, key community programs, and providing healthcare services to residents. The summary below outlines EnviroIssues work and the key outcomes from each of these activities.

ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEWS

EnviroIssues and City staff completed nine interviews with Monroe community partners in early February 2021. During one-on-one interviews community partners were asked a series of questions to learn more about the history of the City of Monroe, where the City was in 2015 when the last vision statement was adopted, how the City has changed over the past five years, and their ideas for engaging Monroe's diverse community in the Imagine Monroe project.

Interviewees represented organizations which included:

- Monroe City Council
- Downtown Monroe Association
- Monroe Historical Society
- Evergreen Health
- Monroe Parks Board
- Evergreen Drug Rehab
- Monroe's Economic Advisory Board
- The Boys and Girls Club
- City of Monroe Staff

Overview of the Monroe Community

Feedback from community partners described the current need for better support for local businesses who are struggling due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Feedback also emphasized the importance of

reopening schools to better support youth in Monroe who are struggling with virtual learning and the distance from their friends. Outdoor recreation activities, such as outdoor sports, were mentioned as a potential way to help youth engage with each other in-person. Feedback from community partners also suggested that there is a need for the City to address issues with parking, traffic, increasing homelessness and drug use. Community partners felt people are drawn to living in the City because of the affordability of the City and the proximity to the mountains and larger cities in the area.

When asked about the history of the City, community partners who have lived in Monroe for a long time mentioned the growth the City has experienced in their lifetime. Feedback included that the City has transitioned from a small center surrounded by mostly agricultural land to a small center surrounded by mostly commercial areas. The construction of US 2 has also brought a lot more traffic into the area and impacted Monroe's downtown. As more businesses were built along US 2 investment in businesses downtown was reduced and fewer people were incentivized to go downtown. Community partners also described Monroe as a City that is highly family oriented with multiple generations of families choosing to stay in the City.

When asked about how the City has changed since the last vision statement was adopted in 2015, some community partners mentioned that there was an economic downturn that prevented some of the new projects and ideas that came out of the City's last comprehensive planning process from being implemented. Other community partners mentioned the City's implementation of critical infrastructure projects that helped improve parking in Downtown Monroe, which was in poor shape five years ago.

2015 vision statement

When reviewing the current vision statement, community partners liked the emphases on investment in downtown Monroe, that the statement highlights City resources (e.g. Riverfront, geographic location) and talks about welcoming people of all demographics. Regarding the structure of the vision statement, community partners felt the language could be clearer and more concise. They suggested that a future vision statement should read more like poetry and emphasized that any future vision statement should encompass the whole City, not just downtown or the industrial areas near US 2.

Suggestions for outreach

When asked about their suggestions for Imagine Monroe outreach, community partners recommended using a broad range of activities and notification tools. They emphasized the need to provide opportunities for participation outside of business hours and suggested offering childcare for families with young children. They also recommended placing posters and other notification materials in central locations, like near the walking trails in Lake Tye park.

Additionally, community partners emphasized the need to go directly to people either in-person or by partnering with neighborhood specific groups. To engage Monroe's large Latinx community they additionally recommended providing materials in Spanish. They also mentioned people who speak Russian connected to the Boys and Girls club and Evergreen Health. Lastly, community partners felt the Monroe community would be receptive to opportunities to connect directly with the Mayor and City staff.

FOCUS GROUPS

EnviroIssues completed three focus group meetings. During focus groups EnviroIssues asked participants a series of questions to learn more about their experiences in the City of Monroe, thoughts on the City’s 2015 vision statement, and ideas about how to best reach them and their neighbors to engage in future outreach activities.

The focus groups for the long-term and new residents were held on February 3, 2021 with five to seven participants respectively. The focus group for residents who speak Spanish was held on February 4, 2021 with five participants. EnviroIssues distributed gift cards to everyone who participated to value the time they took to share their feedback with the City. The key takeaways from each focus group discussion are organized below.

Long-term residents

Category	Long-term residents
Biggest issues facing Monroe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traffic in and around the City. • Fireworks in the close-knit neighborhood areas on the 4th of July leading to lots of noise and safety concerns. • Traffic Highways US2 and 522. • Not enough crosswalks leading from Monroe neighborhoods to many of the community walking/activity areas. • Outdoor areas for families and the community to gather. • Sense of safety due to an increase in crime. • Tolerance for each other.
Reasons why focus group participants live in Monroe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The affordable cost of living. • Feeling of living in a small town. • Proximity to bigger cities (e.g. Seattle, Redmond). • Good connections for families. • Proximity to large and small businesses/community resources.
Reasons why they think others move to Monroe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost of living relative to surrounding areas (e.g. Redmond). • Safety and walkability. • Feeling of living in a small town. • Good schools. • Growing community.
Issues during the pandemic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Businesses are struggling, there needs to be better support for Monroe restaurants and small businesses so they can open up (e.g. invest in better air filtration systems, find ways to offer outdoor seating). • Information needs to be more available to everyone (e.g. posting in a central location and encouraging people to the right places). • Youth need more activities outside of virtual classes so they can socialize with each other.

Category	Long-term residents
Is now a good time to discuss the visioning process?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes, now is a good time to dream and plan for the future. • We have more time right now so it's a good time to address longer term goals. • Some felt that now is a challenging time to think about long-term goals because it's hard to know what the future looks like even from week to week. • Now is the time to learn from what we are currently experiencing. • All group members said they would be interested in participating in other Imagine Monroe activities.
Core values of Monroe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family-oriented – emphasis on kids and families. • Supportive community. • Desire for safety. • Care for mental health and drug addiction. • Active lifestyle. • Education is important. • Have some work to do in tolerance/ being anti-racist.
Vision Statement feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The residents generally liked the vision statement. • There's a lot of great ideas communicated, including ideas that focus group members are thinking about. • Had some concerns about the first paragraph talking about Monroe as a community transitioning from a "small rural town" to a "city of regional significance". The group likes the small town feel of Monroe and doesn't want that to change. • Would like the town to grow in terms of access to family friendly things and activities to do in the City but need to be careful about how the City thinks about growth. • Don't know if everything in the vision statement is doable. • Focus group members were drawn to words such as "small town", "walkability", "improving 522 and highway to commercial districts", "navigation" and "wayfinding". • The vision statement is too detailed overall – needs to be closer to a paragraph in length. Detail can be broken out in a complimentary document. • Would like the vision statement to be higher level and bigger picture. • Question about why the Skykomish river is mentioned as a place for "recreation, economic and tourist opportunities". There are safety issues with going to the riverfront that need to be addressed before it would be safe to use. • Should be something in the vision statement about community members contributing to the City through volunteering/ "cleaning up the community".

Category	Long-term residents
Community outreach for Imagine Monroe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use as many channels as possible to reach people in a lot of different places to make sure we're gathering opinions for a diverse range of people. • Community survey or questionnaire – put on Facebook, mailers to homes, etc. • Give people the opportunity to vote on potential projects the City wants to prioritize (e.g. transportation projects, crosswalk locations, etc.). • Challenge to engagement is that there is a lack of clarity on the process for engaging in decisions the City is making. • Challenge with surveys is getting people to participate. If you offer an incentive people are much more likely to participate (e.g. raffle for businesses in Monroe). • To build trust with the community focus on conversations with neighbors. • There's strong community activity on Facebook. • Make engagement opportunities low-commitment (e.g. not a long meeting). • Need to describe what a vision statement is in communication to the community, "what is the purpose behind what all of this is and is this really going to help." • Communicate that community participation in the project is important. The outcome of this project will lead directly to work the City is doing in the community. "If you want to see a change in the community you need to show up." • Gaining trust with the Latinx community is important! They are a big part of the community. Reach out to leaders in the Latinx community including pastors, school leaders, etc. • "If you're raising kids here, what do you want the community to look like for their future? The only way you'll have a say is if you speak up." • Community town hall with direct access to the Mayor and City staff. • Make it clear in the pitch for participation that this is a community driven vision, "your voice matters." • Feeling that large events have the potential to get out of control, less potential for participation.

Category	Long-term residents
Outreach resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facebook pages: City of Monroe, Police Department page, You had me at Monroe, Let it fly Monroe, Snohomish County page • Ring camera provides information about what’s going on in the neighborhood. • Email notifications. • Mayor’s weekly newsletter. • City of Monroe website. • Nextdoor Fylands. • Neighborhood blogs / police blotter. • Word-of-Mouth: Families get a lot of this through communication from the schools • Community organizations: YMCA, Medical community (e.g. clinics, providers, counselors, dentists), Gyms, small business owners (restaurants, retail, shops, Fred Meyer), Chamber of Commerce, Food banks, shelters/transitional housing providers/”weather shelters”, Prison community and staff, Boys & Girls Club, churches

New residents

Category	New residents
Biggest issues facing Monroe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determining where to start with managing growth and infrastructure development within the City (e.g. there was paving completed in the industrial area last year but why did the City start there). • Increasing crime and the rise in theft/home break-ins. • Rising homeless population. • The support for small businesses, especially businesses located on Main Street. • Lack of sidewalks and low maintenance in care of roads. • Traffic is an increasing problem in Monroe, especially with additional town homes being built. • Traffic is an issue for people who live in the neighborhoods near the train tracks – often have to stop and wait for the train and then get stuck in traffic on US 2 or 522. • Noise during the 4th of July.
Reasons why focus group participants moved to Monroe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The affordable cost of living. • Proximity to work. • Proximity to bigger cities (e.g. Seattle, Bellevue). • Friendly neighbors / strong community feel. • Can see the community growing.
Reasons why they think others move to Monroe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The affordable cost of living. • Small town feel. • The ability to establish deeper relationships with neighbors. • They have family in the City.

Category	New residents
Issues during the pandemic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Families with school-aged children are having trouble supporting their children if they can't work from home. • Small businesses need more support. They aren't able to do business in the same way they have in the past because of COVID restrictions and people who used to support them can't because of job layoffs. This is a statewide and local problem. • Group was generally unsure about what the specific Monroe community needs are. • Group mentioned that they would like more information about the successes and needs of the community in the Mayor's weekly newsletter. • Children are struggling because they need to wear masks and they can't get too close to their friends.
Is now a good time to discuss the visioning process?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's hard to plan for the future right now because it's unclear when COVID will end. • All group members said they are interested in participating in other Imagine Monroe activities.
Core values of Monroe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family-oriented • Kid friendly • Supportive community • Respect • Privacy • Safety • Trust • Honesty • One member said they would like civility and collaboration to be a core value in the city but they aren't currently.
Vision statement feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liked the vision for the City to be a place where "all demographics can find a welcoming place to live." • Thought the language about infrastructure was interesting, since many in the community feel infrastructure in Monroe needs to be improved. • Liked the vision to "help make Monroe easier to navigate" because it's not currently easy to get around the City by car. Downtown Monroe and Main St. are particularly hard to access due to traffic and limited parking. • Liked the idea of diversifying where small businesses are located (e.g. instead of located downtown, allow for more small businesses to be located in community neighborhoods). • The group agreed that the vision statement was verbose, "not very exciting" or motivating. It feels like a "laundry list" of items the City wants to accomplish.

Category	New residents
Community outreach for Imagine Monroe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It could be challenging to engage a lot of people since everyone has a lot going on. “People who want to engage will.” • Put out a mailer/email with a survey and target everyone in the 98272 zip code. • Some people are more likely to look at a physical piece of mail and others are more likely to look at an email or a notification through Nextdoor. • Will need to use a variety of activities to reach people and help them engage in the project. Use a “blanket approach.” • Recommended including diverse communities and using welcoming and “call to action” language that would inspire more people to participate. • Group prefers small outreach activities. • Take the Next Step offers support to the Latinx community. • Make sure there is transparent communication about the process and show people that their feedback was heard. • Group was excited that Monroe is revisiting their mission and vision and that they realize it’s important to include the community.
Outreach resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facebook pages: Moms of Monroe, Freylands, General Monroe group, business group pages, Monroe Police Department • Mayor’s Twitter feed and Facebook page • Nextdoor • Choose Monroe • Word of mouth between neighbors and friends • Monroe Equity Council - Wednesday meetings • Community groups: Public School District, religious groups, small businesses – especially near the Frylands/US2 (e.g. Dreadknots, Jump Rattle and Roll, Reptile Zoo, Gino’s, Ben Franklin, Posano’s Coffee, The Coup, etc.), Take the Next Step, Sky Valley food bank, Women’s Gospel Mission

Residents who speak Spanish

Category	Spanish-speaking residents
Biggest issues facing Monroe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Creating more jobs. ● Communicating with people who speak a different language, especially Spanish speakers. ● Better support for Monroe youth, especially Latinx youth <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ There isn't enough productive activities for youth - programming or places for kids to go and recreate (e.g. bowling alley). Group mentioned that the City of Sultan has good youth programs. ○ Virtual learning has been a challenge for parents and youth. Parent's who aren't able to work from home have a hard time supporting their children's virtual learning – some of whom go to different schools and have different schedules. ● Increased traffic. ● Making the industrial areas of the City more inviting. The group would like to see more businesses and sidewalks added to these areas. ● Crosswalk safety - the group referenced that cars don't stop for children crossing the street. ● The growing homeless population in the City. ● Lack of support for community members with disabilities.
Reasons why focus group participants moved to Monroe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Calmness and quietness. ● Proximity to nature, grocery stores – especially Mexican markets, and gyms. ● The small size of the city. ● The helpfulness of the police department.
Reasons why they think others move to Monroe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Access to river and nature. ● Less traffic than other places in the area. ● Affordable cost of living – although the group noted that they are concerned about the cost of living increasing. ● Small feel of the City.
Issues during the pandemic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Not as many visitors to the City or people walking around the streets. ● School-aged children are struggling with remote learning and distancing from their friends. ● Insufficient support from schools (especially for Latinx families). The group referenced several examples of how children from Latinx families are being treated differently in Monroe schools. ● Not enough in-language materials. It has been hard to follow the City's guidelines for safety during the pandemic – the group mentioned the City of Sultan's community bulletin board at the visitor center which acts as a central place for information and in-language materials. ● Not enough access to therapists and psychologists.
Is now a good time to discuss the visioning process?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Yes, all group members were excited to be involved in the process and to participate in other Imagine Monroe activities.

Category	Spanish-speaking residents
Core values of Monroe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respect (e.g. police department supporting Latinx families) • Peaceful • Community centric – referenced events like Monroe Night Out and Cinco de Mayo • Small business oriented • Loyalty • Passion • Honesty • Efficiency • Secure • Optimistic • Positive • Committed • Unity – referenced that there’s room for improvement here.
Vision Statement feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The group really liked the current vision statement format – referenced bullet points and language allowed them to visualize what the City might look like in the future. • Had some concerns about the first paragraph talking about Monroe as a community transitioning from a “small rural town” to a “city of regional significance”. The group likes the small town feel of Monroe and doesn’t want that to change. • The group noted that the vision statement presents a nice picture but they wonder if it’s achievable. • The group would like to see more support for Monroe youth in the vision statement – Need to consider our children because they are the future of the City. • The group noted the need for making the City more accessible to walking and biking through adding sidewalks and bike lanes. Many of them have single car households. • The group noted they want to see more about keeping the City an affordable place to live. • The group liked the second bullet which talks about the City’s highway commercial districts and boosting their attractiveness, diversity and walkability.
Community outreach for Imagine Monroe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group suggested asking youth for their opinions on what they want the future of the City to look like. They recommended activities that children could do at home (e.g. questionnaire, drawing competition) and to incentivize their participation by offering a prize. • Provide in-language activities for Spanish speakers.

Category	Spanish-speaking residents
Outreach resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community church programs for youth – Kids Club • Facebook groups: Mujeres Latinas, City of Monroe, Moms of Monroe, Monroe Public Schools, Let it Fly Monroe, Latinas con Actitud (Not Monroe Specific, but specific to Washington) • Don't use Nextdoor or other social media sites for Monroe. • Haven't subscribed to the City's listservs since resources aren't available in Spanish. • It would be nice to have a Facebook page for people in Monroe who speak Spanish or some other central place to find in-language information – a phone number to call for information in Spanish or a central location on Main St. for resources in Spanish. • Community groups: Take the Next Step, Family Connection Themes of Monroe, Familias de Monroe, Monroe schools

NEXT STEPS

The findings from one-on-one interviews and focus groups are being used by EnviroIssues to develop the Communications and Outreach plan for the engagement phase of the Imagine Monroe project, planned to begin later this Spring/Summer. The Communications and Outreach Plan along with this summary will be reviewed and discussed by the Imagine Monroe Sounding Board in March 2021.