



Town of Acton
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TARGETED COMMUNITY OUTREACH:
ACTON LATIN FAMILY NETWORK
Sunday, May 18, 2008
Clubhouse Village of Nagog Woods

Six members of the Latin Family Network participated in a focus group discussion as part of the Comprehensive Community Plan outreach process. Participants were attending an annual event organized by the Family Network. They were the only Acton residents at the event and sat together in a group to respond to the visioning questions. The discussion took place in Spanish and lasted approximately one and a half hours. Both men and women participated; all had small children. Those present estimated that there are approximately thirty Latino families living in Acton; they are mostly from the following countries: Argentina, Columbia, Mexico, Venezuela, Peru and Guatemala.

Participants pointed to the fact that they represented a particular socio-economic group and that the less affluent was not represented in the sample. They emphasized that those not present have very different needs and perceptions. They tried to make some comments on their behalf (e.g. the need for providing affordable housing and the need for identifying families in need of support).

Participants were asked the following questions. Shaded responses represent the group's priorities (they were asked to vote on the complete list of responses to the questions).

Why do you live in Acton/did you move to Acton? (Porque viven en Acton/fueron a Acton?)

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- It is close to work
 - Schools (3)
 - More affordable housing than other comparable communities
 - Affordable for families

What do you like about Acton? (Que aspectos les gustan sobre de Acton?)

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- Parks, open space, green
 - Safety
 - Schools
 - Has most things that I need
 - Centrally located
 - No significant traffic jams
 - Close enough to the city, has what we need, but without the major problems



***What don't you like about Acton and would like to see change in the future?
(Que aspectos no les gustan y quieren ustedes cambiar?)***

- Lack of center to walk around in, gather in, shop, eat, etc.
 - Need to beautify town (“only West Acton has had attention paid to it, what about the rest of the town?” Would like more vital, attractive village centers.
- Lack of public transportation within town, not even taxi service (what would one do in an emergency?)
- High taxes
- Douglas school building outdated
- Poorly maintained recreation facilities (need bathrooms, parking, need to update facilities)

If you could do one thing to improve Acton, what would it be? (Si pueden cambiar solamente un aspecto de Acton, cual estara?)

- Improve water quality – once a month the water is brown (“why are there no wells?”)
- Extend sewer to all homes
- Increase environmental measures related to sustainable development
 - Need for municipal trash pick up
 - Need for free recycling/transfer station
- Provide full-day kindergarten for all kindergartners
- Provide foreign language instruction starting at Kindergarten

What issues would you say are most important to the Latino community? (Que piensan ustedes son las temas mas importante en la comunidad de los Latinos en Acton?)

- Need for access to the schools for ethnic celebrations, language instruction, etc.
- Need for affordable housing
- Need to help identify families in need and connect them with existing resources. Often there are families who are in crisis but who are disconnected, they have no access to resources that could provide support, and often do not know where and how to get help, have language barriers and do not reach out.
 - The Latino Family Network would like to work with the schools and Town Hall to ***identify families who are potentially in need*** of support.



They have access to volunteers who could help these families once they are stabilized. They feel that often the issues are multi-faceted and are currently dealt with in a fragmented manner whereas a more holistic approach (e.g. tending to issues of education, employment, healthcare, etc.) is proven to be more successful. All participants felt the schools could play a larger role in helping to identify these families and connect them to resources.

- In addition they identified the need for a *welcoming committee for immigrant families*. They need information in their language and help with networking and accessing information and resources.

***What are some obstacles to your and other Latino families' participation in town activities and what could the town do to help you be more involved?
(Que pueden hacer los officios de Acton para ayudarse o apoyarse en participar en los actividades de la municipalidad?)***

The main reason participants cited for their lack of participation in town affairs was a lack of time as well as the fact that many of the *meetings take place during evening hours* which are difficult for families with young children. They also felt that for others the two main obstacles to participation were:

- ***Language barriers*** (they felt that even for those who speak English well if materials were translated into Spanish it would make people feel more welcome)
- Most immigrants from Spanish-speaking countries are not used to this kind of governance, they are ***not familiar with the volunteer process*** and do not really know what to do and how to enter the system.