

Building bridges

Build bridges between groups (Connection): Rapid growth and increasing diversity have made it harder for us to know our neighbors and communicate about things that matter. We need to be intentional about providing spaces and places for people to interact with those they don't know. The sense of community will naturally grow as people connect.

There are a range of events in Columbia — from the annual ["Columbia Values Diversity"](#) and community [Thanks-giving celebrations](#), to art and music festivals, — that are designed to bring people together. Organizations like the [Children's Grove](#) seek to promote kindness and connection. City government has helped launch the online "My Neighborhood" social media platform and otherwise sought to strengthen connections in our neighborhoods. Yet forum participants identified many divisions between different neighborhoods and individuals in our communities.

"City being divided like St. Louis with north and south. Growth headed south instead of all directions."

"Realtors tend to say, "Well, you don't want to go to this section of town..." Affects the way a town is."

Participants also expressed the sense that as Columbia has grown, it had become harder for individuals to connect with each other.

"Things that are too popular grow out of reach of the community."

On community: "Columbia waxes and wanes. Now on the downside."

"lack of neighborliness – techonology and time"

"We don't know our neighbors."

Participants pointed out that with fewer connections, it is easier to stereotype, fear, and avoid those who are different than us.

"People want to stay in their comfort zone."

"Some folks don't want bridges built."

"De facto segregation here."

"We get into niches that fit us too well."

"Advised not to 'go north of Broadway.'"

"People don't trust other people."

Participants also asked: “A bunch of communities making a larger one! How do you bring those communities together?” And they had a number of answers, including gathering together, listening, “getting to know each others’ stories,” using social media, and otherwise interacting and enjoying each others’ company:

“Create community by learning together and developing a common knowledge and understanding – of what our values and beliefs and what our common points are that give us a point to start working together.”

“We need to stay in touch with our own perceptions and the perceptions of others in order to begin to develop a true sense of community.”

“Centralized community forums can encourage diverse discussions by the nature of the central location and discussion.”

“MUSIC UNITES PEOPLE.”

In addition to promoting stronger connections between neighbors and neighborhoods, participants suggested strengthening connections between city and county governments, between city government and staff and citizens, between schools and the communities they are located in, and among organizations doing similar work. The potential actions and concerns that are suggested on the following page primarily focus on connecting neighbors and neighborhoods.

Use this space to gather your thoughts for dialogue, to make notes as others speak, or to reflect:

MY EXPERIENCE:

I CAN LIVE WITH:

WE SHOULD START WITH:

MY IDEAS:

I CAN’T ACCEPT:

WHAT I CAN DO NOW:

Suggestions

Concerns

My thoughts

Individuals can knock on their neighbor's doors and get to know them.

"If you knock on a door, you don't know if the person who answers will have a gun and want to shoot you."

Community groups could work together to bring together diverse groups on a regular basis in order to maintain a focus and dialogue on "the common good."

For what purpose? This could be a big waste of time and people are busy!

Local media can plan a "trading places" program covered by news media so people can experience how each other live.

This could be exploitive, costly and reinforce rather than heal divides.

The city could offer a tax or fee incentive for residents to interact with their neighbors using the Neighborhood Watch model.

This does not address inter-neighborhood communication. It's also not a good use of our tax dollars. Neighbors shouldn't need a payment to be neighbors.

Schools could work with neighborhoods to create "neighborhood events" that are open to the whole community.

Could be costly and it takes away from mission of schools.

Media organizations and community groups could work together to create accessible grass roots events involving music that draw people to different neighborhoods, especially those with mixed reputation.

This creates potential liability for host organizations and would be difficult to organize and sustain.