

NORTH HIGHLINE GOVERNANCE STUDY

FOCUS GROUP REPORT

August 18, 2005

Focus Groups conducted by: Cathy Allen,
The Connections Group

Focus Group #1 See page 1

Location: Boulevard Park Police Storefront

Date: August 3, 2005, 5:30pm-7pm

Focus Group #2 See page 5

Location: Boulevard Park Police Storefront

Date: August 3, 2005, 7:30pm-9pm

Focus Group #3 See page 9

Location: White Center Community Center

Date: August 6, 2005, 11am-12:30pm

Focus Group #4 See page 13

Location: White Center Community Center

Date: August 6, 2005, 1-2:30pm

NORTH HIGHLINE GOVERNANCE STUDY

Focus Group #1

I. Demographic and Focus Group Profile

Focus group #1 consisted of twelve North Highline residents, which were five women and seven men. Four neighborhoods—Boulevard Park, White Center, Shorewood, and Top Hat—were represented, and two participants, a male and a female, were from the Asian American community (see attached form).

II. Initial Views and Reasoning

When asked their preference of governance during the survey, nine members of the focus group chose to remain in unincorporated King County, while two preferred annexation to Burien, and one preferred annexation to Seattle. When the moderator asked what was attractive about remaining with King County, the group responded in general that taxes were fewer and lower, especially in comparison with Seattle.

Jeffrey: "It will cost \$500 more for Seattle, and about \$120 more for Burien."

Layne: "We don't get stuck with the Monorail tax."

Several group members, but not all, expressed satisfaction with their current services and expressed hopes to maintain them.

Layne: "I love my Sheriff... We got [911] response in under two minutes [general agreement]."

Two participants disagreed.

Alan: "It's the police response I have a problem with... I know that these guys are stretched thin... Maybe we ought to incorporate into another city; they may have better resources and police officers."

Anna: "These last three years have been so bad [with youth vandalism and crime]... We formed a block watch. We called the police and they said they'd get there if they can. I'm afraid to go out and say anything to these kids."

When the moderator asked how is it people felt that King County gave them nothing, but still they wanted to remain unincorporated, the group in general disagreed with the question.

Brian: "I think King County is great."

Mark: "In rural King County people say that, but [here] most people are very pleased."

Anna: "But would we keep all of them [services] if we stayed unincorporated?"

Observations and Conclusions

As shown in Anna's quote, though most of the group ideally favored remaining unincorporated, they recognized that King County would not maintain their current level of services and taxes. The majority seemed to want to preserve their services and service providers, but they agreed that King

County would continue to cut their budget. Because of this they were willing to explore other options.

Jeffrey: "King County is not going to support us."

III. Considering Annexation and Incorporation

Participants felt they needed more information regarding the consequences of annexation. In addition to wanting a cost/benefit analysis, participants expressed the need to know the changes in services and service providers given each possible scenario.

Alan: "How will they [existing services] be meshed into the (new) system?"

Jim: "[If there is an annexation] what happens to the housing renovations?"

When asked what the values for considering annexation or incorporation were, the group responded with the following:

Jeffrey: "Who is going to clean up our streets, reduce our crime rates... attract businesses with a B&O tax that isn't outrageous, who is going to make this area prosper."

Jim: "[Property value] I don't want to be priced out of the neighborhood."

Bill: "People pay their sewer bill to Seattle; it is still Southwest Suburban... it is ten dollars higher [in Seattle]."

Anna: "I'm on septic. What's that going to do to me?"

When asked where the line should be for a split annexation, participants seemed more interested in rationally discussing options that included the entire area.

Layne: "The area is so knit, it is hard to decide."

Observations and Conclusions

Naturally, taxes and services are the leading concerns. The majority of the group expressed or agreed with improving services, or at the least maintaining status quo, while keeping taxes and costs at a minimum. Still, participants accepted that taxes were likely to increase in any scenario. Eight participants said a \$500 increase at most would be ok. Also important to participants was how their representation and ability to direct community prerogative would change if annexed (see section IV, V, and VI).

IV. Considering Burien: Pros and Cons

To shift the discussion to the topic of annexation and public opinion regarding the possibilities, the group was asked to talk about the positive aspects of Burien and what makes it favorable for annexation.

Mark: "They [Burien] have a vision. They have a plan."

Alan: "If we were annexed into Burien, the response time [police] would probably be better."

Mark: "We will have a bigger voice in local politics."

Layne: "Burien uses volunteers, and I'd like to see them do that here. We won't get results until people step up."

Immediately, several participants viewed Burien as a way to have a larger influence in local politics, which resonated well with the whole group. A couple participants furthermore felt that Burien would better the police and overall safety of the area. It was generally agreed upon that annexation to Burien would be the best way to preserve the “small community” atmosphere of North Highline, while allowing for greater influence and participation in politics and planning.

Mark: “They [Burien] seem to be a real strong group, pushing things even against popular opinion [in reference to the town square project]. Whether right or wrong, they’re getting things done... I’m a bit concerned they didn’t want us in the first place.”

Jim: “Seattle didn’t want us [either]. We’d be a burden on anyone.”

Anna: “Burien is weighing whether it would be a value to them to accept us.”

Observations and Conclusions

These quotes reveal a sentiment that neither Burien nor Seattle has a positive opinion on annexing North Highline, and additionally the cities will act without consideration to the popular opinion of North Highline. This said, there was no passionate or outspoken opposition to annexation by Burien. Concerns with Burien seemed to be counterbalanced by greater concerns with Seattle.

V. Considering Seattle: Pros and Cons

Continuing the discussion on annexation, the group was asked to talk about what would tip them towards favoring annexation by Seattle.

Jeffrey: “Seattle has more to offer when it comes to multi-cultural diversity.”

Jennifer: “I feel like Seattle is here already. They are doing a good job rounding up dealers. Seattle will increase my property value.”

Layne: “I’m pretty happy with the City of Seattle. I think there are some high power things that come with Seattle that other cities might not be able to do, like negotiating.”

Though several participants had positive impressions of certain aspects of Seattle like diversity, regional power, and increased property value, the discussion quickly turned to negative impressions and concerns with Seattle. Increased property value, for instance, was first listed as a benefit, but the majority believed it to be harmful. When asked what would be the most objectionable tax increase, the majority believed it would be the property tax increase that would occur if Seattle annexed.

Jim: “I don’t want to be priced out [of a home].”

Jeffrey: “If we’re incorporated [annexed] into Seattle, we’re a tiny little dot on a huge map. Our voice is just going to be the smallest squeak. We won’t see better services than we have now. We will retain more of a rural stature if we are not part of Seattle.”

Bill: “Seattle will be a middle man [for utility taxes].”

Cindy: “I might move out [if Seattle annexes].”

Observations and Conclusions

The majority of the group saw annexation to Seattle as a negative scenario, and at least several were passionate in their opposition to the idea. Several times it was mentioned that North Highline would be a “tiny spot” or a “speck” on the Seattle map. In this light, it seemed that North Highline would be little more than an addition to Seattle’s tax base, would receive no better services, and would have little say in Seattle’s governance. Furthermore, two participants voiced a concern that Seattle would overdevelop housing in North Highline.

VI. Pivotal Points and Final Decisions

When the moderator asked for a final vote at the end of the discussion, six participants said Burien would be their first choice for the governance options, two participants said Burien would be their choice if remaining unincorporated was not a realistic option, and four participants said Burien would be their choice if remaining unincorporated *or* incorporating into a new city were both not realistic options. All four who were interested in incorporating were women. To boil the choices down to Burien and Seattle, all twelve chose Burien over Seattle.

Jim: “[With Burien] There would be continuity, [we] would still have the same school district, fire district, and police department, though I’d like to improve on that a little bit.”

Alan: “I like the small community atmosphere. I would fight for Burien.”

Observations and Conclusions

Participants in focus group #1 chose Burien for three main reasons:

1. Belief there would be less change. Because Burien has a similar population size and already shares several services with North Highline, it was natural that participants had greater affinity and trust towards Burien. Some believed Burien and North Highline shared common interests, such as maintaining a more rural community lifestyle.
2. Belief there would be greater representation. Again, the similar size and dynamics of Burien allowed participants to believe they would have more influence in local matters and politics than in Seattle.
3. Belief there would be comparable, if not better, services for less. Though generally unhappy about any tax increase, participants felt they would receive more services for their money with Burien. This is due partly to sharing service providers with Burien, and partly to the perception of Seattle having a costly bureaucracy, wasting money, and having higher crime rates.

In several cases, the dominating negative opinions of Seattle worked to the additional advantage of Burien. When surveyed, only two participants chose the option to annex to Burien. For some, Burien may just serve a less undesirable option than Seattle. Combined with the above positive opinions of Burien, ten participants either changed their opinion entirely to favor Burien, or viewed Burien as the second best option. It should be noted that the one supporter of Seattle changed her opinion during the discussion as well.

Jennifer: “I would vote for Burien solely on what I heard along the way [referring to the discussion] as far as a smaller area, with more voice... if I could get those things.”

NORTH HIGHLINE GOVERNANCE STUDY Focus Group #2

I. Demographics and Focus Group Profile

Focus group #2 consisted of seven North Highline residents, which were three women and four men. Six participants were Caucasian, and one was African American. Four neighborhoods—Boulevard Park, White Center, Shorewood, and Salmon Creek—were represented (see attached form).

III. Initial Views and Reasoning

Results from the initial survey and response showed varied opinions for governance options. Two participants chose to remain in unincorporated King County, two chose to divide the area, one chose to annex to Burien, one chose annex to Seattle, and one did not know. The group agreed that it was unrealistic to remain as part of King County, and the participants were willing to weigh the benefits and costs of the various governance scenarios. However, two participants, Butch and Claire, were more concerned with viewing options for Boulevard Park as a separate entity from the rest of N. Highline (see section 3).

Vince: "I have a lot of conflicting views about Seattle versus Burien. I would like to find out more."

Jennifer: "I'm interested in learning about the advantages."

Butch: "Boulevard Park needs to separate itself and look at other options that the Seattle/Burien thing."

Claire: "Boulevard Park would like to speak for itself, separate from the UA [Unincorporated Area]."

The group was asked about what they felt was important to preserve in unincorporated King County.

Jennifer: "The autonomy in making decisions."

Claire: "We have our own little pride in our little niche [Boulevard Park]. We're like country in the city, and we like that."

Janet: "Highline schools have a better reputation [than Seattle public schools]."

The group agreed in general that autonomy, rural atmosphere, location, and schools were positive attributes to being in unincorporated King County. However, two participants took the opportunity to express dissatisfaction with their current services, the police in particular.

Tom: "I'm very concerned about police service. My house was broken into and it took over 2½ hours before anyone [the police] showed up."

Butch: "My house was also broken into, and it took them about four [hours to come]."

Observations and Conclusions

Though the group had positive impressions of their particular area and communities, they did not seem to attribute these aspects to King County, the collective area of North Highline, or their service providers, with the exception of the Highline School District. Because of this, participants were willing to explore options that involved greater structural change.

Claire: "The unincorporated area isn't cohesive; it's just what is leftover."

Doug: "What are they going to do for us, for our community, for our infrastructure, for our services?"

III. Considering Annexation and Incorporation

When asked about the possibility of incorporating to a new city, participants did suggest interest in the idea, but were quick to doubt the feasibility of the option.

Janet: "King County is [already] trying to cover our area as if it were incorporated, that just can't happen."

Claire: "Even though being incorporated would leave us the most like we are; it would also only leave us with our own resources, where Seattle and Burien already have established programs."

Doug: "I like that idea, but I don't think it can actually happen."

The group was then asked if they favored full or split annexation. Immediately a discussion began concerning splitting the area, so the moderator asked where the divide should be if there was a split annexation.

Butch: "128th over to 509, down to Seattle, over to Apartment 99. I don't know where everything else [smaller neighborhoods] would be, but Boulevard Park is a real easy piece of pie to cut."

Doug: "It seems the natural dividing line would be 509 if you had to split them up [White Center and Boulevard Park], but they do kind of hang together."

Tom: "It makes sense for us not to have the entire region go in one direction, it seems 116th is a natural dividing point."

Janet: "I'm not any of the above. Since I'm not Boulevard Park, I'm not White Center, I'm [for] Burien."

Observations and Conclusions

In the group there were two prevailing perspectives regarding governance options. First, the majority of the group, whether or not they had already formed a preference, was interested in discussing how each scenario would benefit their services. They felt incorporating was unlikely to offer many benefits. Secondly, two participants from Boulevard Park were equally if not more concerned with looking at which option could best serve what they perceived to be the separate aspirations of Boulevard Park. These participants favored a split annexation while some others were less sure, as shown by Janet's comment. This said, all willingly considered it, and by the end the majority supported the idea of splitting the area if the entire region couldn't agree on a particular governance option.

IV. Considering Burien: Pros and Cons

Moving the discussion onward to the main options for annexation, the group was asked to talk about the City of Burien.

Janet: "I use the community center a lot. I like the King County library system so much better than Seattle's. I relate to Burien. I shop there, I live in the area, and I don't like Seattle's."

Doug: "Their going to be economically pinned to the map for a while [referring to the town square project]. Their not going to be doing much for me up in Boulevard Park. I don't believe we will get much service out of them."

Tom: "The Burien/King County resources are too thin, they'd be better in Seattle."

Claire: "Burien wants us because if they don't take us, it will hurt them."

The discussion quickly revealed that several participants had negative impressions of Burien. The group was asked what would change their opinion to favor Burien.

Tom: "A guarantee of improved services, particularly police and fire."

Claire: "No way would I go to Burien unless we are assured our political representation... unless the police are responsive to all the burglaries... a commitment to development."

Jennifer: "Why does Burien want White Center? Is it just for the tax base? Will we receive all of the advantages Burien has?"

Observations and Conclusions

Aside from Janet, the participants felt that Burien would not improve their services. Their opinion was due to the fact that Burien shared several services with them already, namely the police, and the belief that Burien was either financially unable or unwilling to improve services. Furthermore, two participants from Boulevard Park, Butch and Claire, assumed they would not receive adequate political representation if they annexed to Burien.

V. Considering Seattle: Pros and Cons

The group was asked what they felt was positive about the City of Seattle.

Butch: "Seattle has an economic engine... there is spillover. I don't see Burien having the same."

Vince: "As some people pointed out, the benefit of Seattle is the tradition of recognizing neighborhoods."

Tom: "I think that the level of service, the neighborhood representation... the overall support is better in Seattle than Burien."

Though the majority favored Seattle's services and neighborhood representation, there were reservations as well.

Janet: "I don't want my kids going to Seattle schools."

Doug: "I don't want to pay the Monorail tax."

Butch: "The B&O [tax]... is too high."

The moderator asked Janet and Vince, who preferred Burien, and Doug, who originally wanted to stay unincorporated, what would tip them towards Seattle.

Doug: "It would have to be the services."

Janet: "It would take a lot [to go to Seattle]... simply because I don't want to be south Seattle."

Vince: "If we would be treated comparably to some of the longer standing neighborhoods, I would go to Seattle."

Observations and Conclusions

With the exception of Janet, the participants generally viewed Seattle to be a more desirable choice over Burien. The belief that Seattle would provide better services than both Burien and King County was the main deciding factor for many. For them Seattle had the programs and resources to improve areas Burien could or would not. The two participants from Boulevard Park, Butch and Claire, argued that Seattle provided a better forum for neighborhood representation, which was a conviction other participants appeared to agree with as well.

VI. Pivotal Points and Final Decisions

At first glance it was difficult to pinpoint the consensus in focus group #2. Though all but one preferred the scenario of a Seattle annexation, a couple participants were not satisfied with the main governance options they were given. For instance, Butch and Claire of Boulevard Park wanted their area to separately pursue other possibilities, such as with the City of Tukwila in addition to the main options. Notwithstanding, there were three important observations to be made upon focus group #2.

1. Services were more important than taxes. The group agreed that they would be willing to pay more taxes if it would improve their services. Overall, a monthly increase of 50 dollars was deemed acceptable if there was a noticeable improvement in services. A few went further to raise the increase to 100 dollars, but 50 was the safe consensus.

Tom: "If a 100 [dollars] meant the police would be at my door...in 15-30 minutes... then [yes]."

Claire: "I'm not concerned about the taxes; I'm concerned about the services."

2. Burien image was affected by the opinions on current services. Though not the only deciding factor, the participants who were displeased with their current services chose Seattle over Burien chiefly because King County shared several services with Burien, including the police, who were criticized. Their reasoning was simple: in Burien these services would remain the same since they are the same, whereas in Seattle the services would be better.

Tom: "The Burien/King County resources are too thin, they'd be better in Seattle."

3. In absence of a consensus, a split annexation was agreeable. Due in part to Butch and Claire's preference, the group discussed the idea of a split annexation at several points during the discussion. No one was openly opposed to the idea, though there was concern about how smaller neighborhoods would be affected by a split, since most talk revolved around Boulevard Park. In the end, it was agreed upon that a split annexation would be favorable if the individual areas of North Highline preferred different options, if there was no consensus.

Vince: "We're not saying split it for the sake of splitting it. We're saying that each area should have its own say."

At the end, two participants indicated they had changed their mind from the governance option they originally chose. Doug, who originally chose to remain unincorporated, and Vince, who originally chose Burien, appeared to be favoring Seattle. The belief that Seattle could provide better services was what sparked the change. It should be noted that Janet, who consistently supported Burien, did so on the belief that Burien would be a better location for her children, and that the Highline School

District was superior to Seattle’s public school system. The other participants did not seem to include youth as a motive for their decisions.

NORTH HIGHLINE GOVERNANCE STUDY

Focus Group #3

I. Demographics and Focus Group Profile

Focus group #3 consisted of thirteen North Highline residents. Nine women and four men were present, and five known neighborhoods—White Center, Top Hat, Salmon Creek, Shorewood, and Boulevard Park—were represented. All participants, save for one, considered themselves as Caucasian and at least ten were over the age of fifty.

II. Initial Views and Reasoning

When asked for their preference during the initial survey and the beginning of the discussion, five participants chose to remain unincorporated, two chose annexation to Burien, four chose annexation to Seattle, one was unsure, and one wanted anything but Seattle. When the moderator asked why people wanted to stay unincorporated, the participants in support cited low taxes and sufficient services.

Marc: “We get fire (coverage), we get police, some road work... all you get out of Seattle and Burien is higher taxes.”

Janie G.: “We get community services, like the library.”

The group was asked ideally what option they would choose if all costs were removed from the equation. Many participants chose to stay the same.

Marc: “It’s worked for 20 years.”

Phyllis: “I’ve lived here for 25 years, when I had to call an ambulance... they came right away, and there’s other things I’ve been happy with.”

Some participants disagreed.

Rachel: “One of the services we don’t have is law enforcement... we have a number of ordinances that are unevenly enforced. We are becoming more densely populated... there is pollution, and we need to have sewers.”

Observations and Conclusions

As shown above, participants who favored remaining unincorporated felt they received good services for fair or low taxes. At the beginning, several were reluctant to consider reasons for other options, since they saw no reason to leave King County. However, other participants realized that their current level of services and taxes would likely change if North Highline remained unincorporated.

Phillip: “We’ll see our services diminish (with King County).”

Margaret: “We would like to keep things the way they are, which we realize is a little unrealistic.”

III. Considering Annexation and Incorporation

Participants expressed a need to know more information regarding the consequences of annexation and incorporation, in order to make a decision.

Philip: "Is there a date when this needs to happen? I first heard 2020, then I heard 2010."

Kits: "How will we know our voice will be heard?"

Rachel: "What would happen to our school district in relation to Seattle (annexation)?"

The moderator asked the group what services, if cut by King County, would make them want to annex or incorporate:

Kits: "If they were to tell me they were cutting police service remarkably I would consider."

Carol: "They cut the park service. Whatever happens, we're the south end, they give us the short end of the stick."

The group was asked how they felt about incorporating into their own city. Some participants liked the idea, but most felt it was unrealistic.

Jean: "The cost for infrastructure would be astronomical."

Marc: "You'd have to create a new political system for White Center, Top Hat, etc..."

The group was asked to explain what they thought united the area. Some participants said the area wasn't united, that it was an area "in flux", or that the only thing uniting the area "is that it is unincorporated."

Michael: "People here want to be left alone."

Other participants disagreed, feeling there was a stronger need for unity and community.

Rachel: "We have to protect our sense of diversity. Who has the vision to maintain our communities and honor the diversity that is in our neighborhoods?"

Janie L.: "How are we going to draw those (diverse) people in?"

Phillip: "What underlies all of this is a sense of community. By having an actual board (UAC), it has the psychological thing of (saying) I'm part of this community."

Observations and Conclusions

Unsurprisingly, participants had concerns about the specific consequences of each option they had to choose from. Several participants worried about their communities, how they would change, and how to involve the diverse populations in making the decision. The large majority of the participants realized that King County would cut services if they stayed, and were willing to weigh the options. Still, several were hesitant to consider other options, due to both because they lacked a clear understanding of the possibilities and because they were content with being unincorporated.

Phillip: "Where is the middle ground that everyone will be comfortable with?"

IV. Considering Burien: Pros and Cons

Bringing the discussion to the two main options for annexation, the moderator asked the group what would make annexation to Burien attractive.

Margaret: "I like the idea that they are trying to make themselves a viable area."

Kit: "I like Burien. It's a nice community, a nice neighborhood. We wouldn't be just a speck in the area. I'd be content living in Burien."

Janie L.: "I'd go to Burien. They're trying to include the people, trying to include the area. I think it would be more responsive to the people."

Carol: "They have one of the best parks in Burien."

Jean: "The (North Highline) tax base would be larger for Burien. They would be able to maybe doing more road improvement and more police and the things that we actually want like the libraries and the park maintenance. I think Seattle would tend to forget us."

Some participants did express concern about Burien's expenditures and financial capabilities.

Rachel: "I think the leadership in Burien has had flaws. It seems to me there hasn't been a lot of foresight."

Margaret: I like that and it scares me at the same time [Burien's town square project]. I feel like they're going to be so desperate for money.

Marc: "I personally don't like Burien. They wasted a lot of money on that town center."

Observations and Conclusions

Broadly speaking, the group was able to find positive aspects in Burien, and five participants expressed their preference for Burien. Others were more hesitant, however, and cited the town square project and the lack of leadership, or vision, of Burien as problematic. Despite criticisms, there was no display of passionate opposition to a Burien annexation.

Kit: "I just feel like in Burien we wouldn't be lost."

V. Considering Seattle: Pros and Cons

Continuing the discussion on annexation options, the group was asked what would tip towards favoring annexation by Seattle.

Rachel: "Seattle is a real city that has neighborhoods and whatever we can do to preserve those neighborhoods then we can find our home. I don't see that in Burien. I see Burien being more focused on Burien and not looking around. I think Seattle is the leader in this (regional) community."

Philip: "[A] guarantee of adequate representation. Because whatever happens in Seattle affects us regardless of the boundary."

Other participants spoke of their perceived problems with Seattle.

Marc: "It's the fact of more taxes. They (Seattle) won't put in a sidewalk for me; I'll still be the black sheep."

Margaret: "I'm afraid that development is high on the list of Seattle and the area will be developed in ways we won't have control over."

Janie L.: "They're putting mini ghettos everywhere."

The moderator asked the whole group if they thought they knew enough about the advantages of Seattle to give an informed decision. Many replied that they didn't.

Observations and Conclusions

The participants in favor of Seattle believed that neighborhoods in North Highline would be better developed by Seattle than Burien, and that annexation to Seattle made sense from regional point. Burien, in their perspective, does not consider its neighborhoods in city plans, while Seattle is a "city of neighborhoods." Those against Seattle were mainly concerned with increased taxes, though a few were also concerned that Seattle would overdevelop their neighborhoods.

VI. Final Decisions and Pivotal Issues

When the moderator asked for a final vote between the options of incorporation, annexation to Seattle, and annexation to Burien, no one option received overwhelming support. Six participants voted for a Burien annexation, four voted for a Seattle annexation, and three chose to incorporate. Due to the participants own perceived lack of information, it's probable that some votes could change if and when the participants are further educated on the issue. Despite the fact that there was a somewhat split consensus, the trends behind the votes are predictable. For focus group #3, it should be noted that political representation was a very significant factor in the decisions.

Burien

Six of thirteen participants voted for Burien. These participants identified with the smaller, similarly developed Burien where the North Highline area would not be a "speck," like it would be if annexed to Seattle. There could be greater representation due to its smaller size and population. Furthermore, some participants liked what Burien is trying to accomplish with the town square project, though others were worried about the expense. Another factor which garnered support for Burien was the powerful alternative of an annexation by Seattle. For some, opposition to a Seattle annexation was a reason to choose Burien.

Seattle

The participants who voted for Seattle felt North Highline would receive greater recognition in Seattle as opposed to Burien. Seattle's influence and importance in the greater region was also an attraction, and its infrastructure and services were viewed as superior. It should be noted that taxes appeared to be less of an issue for these participants, provided they felt their money was being well used, whereas other participants disliked the idea of increased taxes.

New City

The three participants who voted to incorporate into a new city hoped to maintain the current state of their area. These participants ideally preferred to remain unincorporated, and if that was not an option, then incorporating into a new city seemed to be the option most likely to preserve the current state. In an apparent contradiction these participants were opposed to increased taxes, yet they voted for the most costly option.

To conclude, the differing perceptions on representation played a large part in the resulting split vote. Those who chose Burien felt representation for North Highline would be best served by

Burien's much smaller population and similar community. In their opinion, North Highline would be lost and "forgotten" in Seattle. Those who chose Seattle argued that Seattle was a "city of neighborhoods" where North Highline would be represented with distinction. Burien, on the other hand, would not act in respect to the diversity and distinction of North Highline. Both perceptions were clearly presented, and both could have considerable sway on popular opinion.

NORTH HIGHLINE GOVERNANCE STUDY

Focus Group #4

I. Demographics and Focus Group Profile

Focus group #4 consisted of nine North Highline residents, which were six men and three women. Five neighborhoods—Boulevard Park, White Center, Salmon Creek, Shorewood, and Top Hat—were represented, and one man was from the Latino community. Six participants were over the age of fifty-five.

II. Initial Views and Reasoning

When asked their preference of governance during the initial survey, five participants chose to remain part of unincorporated King County, two chose to annex to Seattle, and one did not know (the ninth participant arrived after this point in the discussion). To open the discussion, the moderator asked the group what they thought was good about remaining as part of unincorporated King County. The group agreed in general that there was more freedom and less restriction in unincorporated King County. Several participants also expressed having a lack of information.

Paul: "In the county they have a lot more relaxed rules. Just try and get a building permit for a shed in your backyard from Burien. I guarantee you will not last long enough to build the shed."

Lynn: "I have a sense that I don't know what we're being asked, but I'm pleased with the situation the way it is."

The moderator asked if cities and areas with increasing and denser populations needed more regulations.

Fran: "You're right, they do need more rules. But... there are so many rules that go against each other."

Observations and Conclusions

Participants largely shared the view that King County had less restrictions and regulations than both Seattle and Burien. Private property and business freedoms would be infringed upon. Taxation was also an issue, along with a perceived lack of solid information.

III. Considering Annexation and Incorporation

While a few participants implied that more information could sway their opinion, the majority of the group seemed steadfast with their initial opinions, regardless of the available information or the lack thereof.

The moderator asked the group to discuss their opinions on annexation and incorporation. The majority of participants either had no opinion or refused to consider any option other than remaining as part of unidentified King County.

George: "I don't want a new city, there's no tax base. I don't want to go to Seattle, I don't want to go to Burien; the only choice I know is to stay unincorporated."

Fran: "There is not a good reason to annex. Burien did the old trick of gerrymandering to get the largest tax base."

Paul: "In cities, the people who are there are not the caliber of people that you want there."

Two participants wanted more information before they gave an opinion.

Dennis: "I don't know which it should be (Seattle or Burien). I'd like to find out some more information on this issue."

Lynn: "I'm pleased with the situation as it is. (If) Somebody showed me there was some kind of benefit to annex to a new city, then I'm for that."

One participant hoped annexation could improve the area, in particular the streets.

Humberto: "There are certain neighborhoods that could use sidewalks, more streetlamps. I wish they would put speed bumps in some roads. If annexing could help accomplish these things, then maybe it's worth it."

Initially, the participants believed it was unlikely that remaining unincorporated was an option, though one participant challenged the notion.

Paul: "Personally I'd like to stay as it is, but we know that's out. They're going to do something to us."

Fran: "What people don't realize is the county can't throw us out. They have to provide all our services whether they like it or not."

The group was asked about incorporating into a new city, and what they liked about the idea. The response was predictably negative when it came to the practicality of the option, though one participant was interested.

Rachel: "We should be our own city or stay unincorporated. If we choose one city or the other, it will tear apart the schools."

Paul: "Becoming a city is just going to be another big bureaucracy we've got to pay for and that's kind of stupid."

Lynn: "It's getting to a point where it's getting unaffordable. If we build a city here, it's going to come out of the property owners. I could see if we had some source of bigger tax base."

Observations and Conclusions

Despite acknowledging the unlikelihood of remaining unincorporated and a need for more information, the group was very reluctant to consider the possibilities of annexation or incorporation. The conversation had a tendency to return to their opinions on why North Highline should remain unincorporated.

IV. Considering Burien: Pros and Cons

In attempt to promote a discussion of the positive aspects of annexation, the moderator asked the group how Burien could convince them that their city would be a good choice for annexation.

Lynn: "If Burien had more control over its own services."

George: "If they could guarantee to cut my taxes in half."

The conversation quickly returned to negative opinions of annexation and incorporation.

Rachel: "They've done some things to Burien I'm not too fond of."

Paul: "Burien's going downhill... They destroyed their town, destroyed their businesses,"

Fran: "We have the lowest crime rate, Burien and Seattle are higher. Who puts a multi-screen in the middle of Burien, nobody will go to it."

Kirk: "Things are good as they are, we can only improve with the county."

Observations and Conclusions

The group was both reluctant and seemingly unable to find many positive aspects in a Burien annexation. Most did not like the town square project, and did not want Burien to "waste" their money. Taxes were an issue. Again, the group preferred to reiterate their desire to stay as unincorporated King County

V. Considering Seattle: Pros and Cons

The group was asked to discuss how Seattle could convince them their city was a good choice for annexation.

Dennis: "I would like more information."

Interestingly, and perhaps due to the overwhelmingly negative discussion thus far, the two participants who originally supported Seattle did not do so at this opportunity. However, other participants offered their criticism.

Kirk: "Look at all the fiascos Seattle's responsible for. They waste tax dollars left and right. It's putrid. I want nothing to do with Seattle."

Fran: "I'm distressed by Seattle because of the politics inside."

Paul: "Seattle will ignore us enough until we won't be bothered."

Rachel: "I'm worried the integrity of our community will be pummeled."

Observations and Conclusions

As with Burien, the group was not very willing to consider Seattle as a possibility. The general negativity and resolution to remaining as unincorporated King County appeared to extend to the two participants originally in favor of Seattle, since they withheld their support and even agreed with some of the more rational criticism. Taxes were a large concern, as well as how Seattle would affect the community.

VI. Final Decisions and Pivotal Issues

When the moderator asked the group to vote between incorporating into a new city, annexing to Seattle, or annexing to Burien, several participants objected to the vote. They felt it was unfair to limit the options to the three choices.

Paul: "I'd hate for this to be the first time since my twenty-one years of age that I don't cast a ballot, but that's what I'm going to have to do."

Rachel: "How about a write-in ballot."

Kirk: "They'll increase our taxes. That's the reason they want to incorporate (annex) us. The bottom line is we don't want to be incorporated, I think overall if you took a consensus... Why have to pay more?"

Several other participants commented on the issue of voting.

Lynn: "If it's a vote by the people, then you have to go on if the majority wants it."

Fran: "Look at Seattle... the south end gets nothing. We'd be the south. If we went to Burien, we'd be the north. If we have to vote, don't vote for Seattle, vote for Burien."

Observations and Conclusions

A number of reasons were evident in focus group #4's inflexible approach to the issue of annexation and incorporation.

1. Six of the participants were over fifty-five years old, and three were over seventy. The participants who were retired and dependent on a fixed income did not want to see taxes increase, nor did they want to see their community change.
2. Regardless of age, participants generally were content with their services and did not want to see taxes increase. Also, participants did not want their taxes to support some projects in Burien or Seattle, which were roundly criticized.
3. There was a lack of informed decisions. Many of the participants' opinions did not seem to be born from fact. A few participants did not form opinions, citing that they needed more information.

Dennis: "Let's make some educated decisions about what's going on here."

To conclude, age, taxes, and lack of information made for an often inflexible discussion. However, participants did acknowledge the unlikelihood of remaining unincorporated. Though the group contested their options, they did not contest the right of the majority to decide for them.