

World Cafés take Portland's pulse regarding Community Gathering Center

By Ian Blazina
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COLLECTIVE THINKING. Sonali Balajee listens as community members share their ideas for the proposed Community Gathering Center at a recent World Café event. (Photo/Doug Adler)

The City of Portland Bureau of Planning's Vision into Action (VIA) Coalition recently held two World Café events to collect input from community members on a proposed Community Gathering Center. The envisioned center is intended as a platform for collaborating across cultures, organizing diverse communities, and developing future leaders; a space for Portland's varied citizenry to gather, interact, and communicate.

The World Cafés provided a chance for Portlanders from different cultural backgrounds to explore how a new Community Gathering Center could benefit the entire community. They encouraged creative thinking, dialogue through small group discussions, and artistic expression through drawing.

"Today is about the authentic sharing of ideas and creativity," said Sonali Balajee, emcee of the World Café events. "We are here to include everyone's contribution."

Daya Shakya, past president of the Nepalese Association of Oregon, said, "I really enjoyed being there on behalf of the Nepalese community.

"Kudos to all those who are working hard to bring the world together into one place — I would like to spend more time and become a part of this genuine project," Shakya said.

The concept of a community gathering center grew out of the visionPDX project, which received more than 17,000 responses from community members regarding the planning of Portland's future, and the City of Portland's Immigrant and Refugee Task Force, which submitted its recommendations to the Portland City Council for approval in January. While the council approved the recommendations, no funding was carried over to either the Mayor's proposed budget or the alternative budget that was eventually accepted.

VIA now intends to synthesize the data from the World Cafés into a concept paper, which will be used to plan for funding from sources outside of city government. The Community Gathering Center Leadership Group will work with VIA to create a funding plan that is not solely dependent on the city.

"The Leadership Group will work with us to decide whether to make a request in the city's Fall Budget Monitoring Process, to apply for grants, to look for donors, or a combination thereof," said Cassie Cohen of VIA.

The Vision into Action Coalition emerged from Mayor Potter's visionPDX process, which sought to create a community vision of Portland's future. VIA is a community alliance of organizations, businesses, government, and individuals acting collectively to ensure implementation of Portland's community vision.

To learn more, call (503) 823-9588 or visit <www.visionpdx.com>.