



PROMOTING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND HEALTHY EATING

Focus Groups in Mount Vernon

Prepared for:

**Washington Department of Health
Nutrition and Physical Activity Section**

Prepared by:

Gilmore Research Group

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2324 EASTLAKE AVENUE EAST, SUITE 300
SEATTLE, WA 98102-3306

(206) 726-5555
FAX: (206) 726-5620

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background and Purpose

The City of Mount Vernon is developing a Healthy Communities Project, the goal of which is to make changes that will make it easier for people to be physically active and to eat healthy foods. In order to better understand what the changes should be, a qualitative research project was designed to collect opinions and feedback from Mount Vernon residents.

The project included two focus groups with adults between 40 and 65 years old, and two groups with parents of children ages 1 to 9 year-olds.

Participants were screened to achieve a mix of ethnicity and gender and all were compensated for their time and contribution to the discussion. The focus groups were audiotaped with participants' consent. Those tapes or transcripts are available to those who desire greater detail than found in this summary report. For ease of presentation and understanding, results of like groups are presented together.

The primary goal of this research project was to determine which of several proposed changes or measures in the community would be most likely to have a positive impact on increasing physical activity and healthy eating for these parents and middle-aged adults.

Results will be used, along with other information, to assist the Mount Vernon Healthy Communities Project Community Advisory Group in their planning process.

Respondent Profile

A total of 26 respondents participated in the four Mount Vernon focus groups including 12 parents representing children ages 1-9 and 14 adults ages 40-65. Of the parents, four were of Hispanic or Latino descent. Eight participants were female and four were male. In the adult groups, there was one person of Hispanic or Latino descent. Eight of the fourteen adults age 40-65 were male and six were female. A more detailed profile of the respondents is shown in the Appendix.

Summary and Conclusions

Mount Vernon as a Healthy Community

1. In general, focus group participants believe that Mount Vernon is a mostly healthy place to live primarily because the area offers varied outdoor activities due to the geography as well as fairly good availability of parks and recreation facilities. They agreed that traffic congestion and access to fast food restaurants detract from the healthy nature of the community.

Likelihood to Eat Healthier

2. Using a 10-point scale where 1 is “not at all likely” and 10 is “extremely likely,” adults provided an average rating of 7.2, indicating they would be likely to eat more healthily if eating healthy were made easier for them.
3. Parents gave a similar but slightly higher rating of 8.0 indicating that if it were easier for them, their children would be likely to eat more healthily.
4. Following the discussion of the possible changes to promote healthy eating, participants were asked to use the same scale to rate their likelihood to eat more healthily if the changes were made.
 - Among parents, the ratings dropped slightly to 8.0 from 7.2 on the 10-point scale. This could indicate that while the measures came close to

matching parent's expectations about what could be made easier about eating healthy, the measures did not excite parents to the extent that their ratings were higher after discussing the changes. Nevertheless, the ratings indicate that implementing the changes would be effective in making these parent's children eat healthier.

- Among adults, the post-discussion rating of 7.0 (down slightly from 7.2) indicates that suggested changes closely matched expectations of ways to make eating healthier and suggested that the proposed changes would have a positive impact on the community.

Likelihood to Be More Physically Active

5. Using the same 10-point scale where 1 is "not at all likely" and 10 is "extremely likely," adults provided an average rating of 7.7, indicating a high likelihood to be more physically active if being more physically active were made easier for them.
6. Again, parents gave a similar but slightly higher rating of 8.4 indicating that if it were easier for them, their children would be highly likely to be more physically active.
7. Following the discussion of the possible changes to promote physical activity adult participants were asked to use the same scale to rate their likelihood of be more physically active if the changes were made. Their ratings closely mirrored their pre-discussion ratings (7.8 versus 7.7) indicating the proposed changes could have the desired impact of increasing physical activity among adults 40-65 and that the changes met expectations of making physical activity easier.

Most Effective Measures – Eating Healthy

8. Among parents of children ages 1 to 9, the proposed changes that were deemed most effective included those that made healthy foods more

accessible and affordable, followed by those that keep junk foods away from this age child:

- *greater impact of healthy foods offered in school cafeteria*
- *reduce the cost of health food choices*
- *restrict the availability of junk foods in school*
- *ban soft drinks in school*

9. When adults were asked which changes or measures would have the greatest impact on helping them to eat healthier, participants reported two actions addressing access and cost:

- *better availability of healthy, ready to eat foods in restaurants, convenience stores and at snack counters*
- *reduce the cost of healthy food choices*

Most Effective Measures – Being More Physically Active

10. It should be noted that all of the measures tested among parents of children ages 1-9 were viewed positively by most of the parents. The proposed changes that mentioned by the highest number of participants were:

- *free/low cost physical activity programs close to home*
- *safe walking and biking routes to school and in your neighborhood*
- *PE program that promotes activities kids can do throughout their lives.*

11. When asked which changes or measures would have the greatest impact on their likelihood to be more active, adults mentioned :

- *safe sidewalks and walking trails*
- *safe bike paths*
- *free or low cost physical activity programs close to home*

Conclusions

Healthy Eating: Both parents and middle-age adults agreed that having **better access** to healthy foods and **lower cost** healthy foods would help young children and adults eat better. In addition, parents liked the idea of **hands-on experience** for children (growing healthy foods) and generally felt that reaching young children through the schools was appropriate. The adults also felt that having **nutritional information** on ready-to-eat and menu foods would help them.

Physical Activity: Both parents and middle-age adults agreed that **lower cost** activity programs and **greater safety** through better bike and walkways would encourage more physical activity for their children and themselves. Parents also liked the concept of having PE activities that teaches **life-long activity skills** to children.

DETAILED FINDINGS

PARENTS OF KIDS AGE 1 TO 9

Mount Vernon as a Healthy Community

Participants were first invited to share their general perception of Mount Vernon as a healthy community in which to live.

Parents of children 1 to 9 years old tend to perceive Mount Vernon more as a healthy community than as an unhealthy one. Some of the elements participants have identified as indicators of the community's health are:

- The access to varied outdoor activities such as hiking, mountain biking and swimming due to the proximity to mountains, wooded areas, lakes and rivers
- The availability of facilities (parks and recreation, sport fields, gyms)
- The access to fresh local produce
- The activities offered through the parks and recreation department, the YMCA and the Boys and Girls Clubs
- The clean drinking water.

As indicators of the less healthy aspects of the community, parents mentioned the following:

- The rainy climate causes people to stay indoors decreasing physical activity
- Streets that are congested with traffic and poor drivers cause unsafe conditions for pedestrians and bikers.
- Some pollution of lakes and a lack of public access to bodies of water.

Children's Eating Habits

Barriers to Eating Healthy Foods

Parents were asked to identify some barriers in their children's lives to eating healthy foods. Participants in both groups mentioned that healthy foods like fresh fruits and vegetables tend to be expensive and that less healthy foods can be attractive due to their low cost. In addition, parents complained about the lack of family restaurants serving healthy foods. Participants said that, for families with small children, fast food restaurants with unhealthy menu choices are the only choice for those looking for a child-friendly environment. Parents also cited an overabundance of fast food restaurants in the area.

Likelihood of Getting Children to Eat Healthier

Parents were asked to indicate on scale of 1 to 10 (10 meaning extremely likely) the likelihood of their children eating better if it were made easier to eat healthy.

Parents of children under the age of 10 participating in the focus group discussions tend to believe it is likely that their children would eat healthier if eating healthier were made easy for them. The average rating was 8.0 on the 10-point scale. While these parents tend to believe they are doing a good job of providing healthy food and a healthy eating environment inside their homes, they are concerned about the foods served at schools and about the easy access to unhealthy fast food restaurants and convenience stores.

Receptiveness to Healthy Eating Changes

Ten potential changes that could encourage healthier eating habits were presented to parents of children age 1 to 9 years old.

Greater Availability of Healthy Food Offered in School Cafeteria

Parents were positive about the idea of a greater availability of healthy food at school or day care. Many of them expressed dissatisfaction with the menu choices at school. As one mother stated, “You can have the corn dog or you can have the cheeseburger.” Others mentioned that providing a packed lunch from home is expensive. Participants complained about the high levels of sugars and carbohydrates being served and the lack of good proteins, fresh produce and whole grains. They spoke about the importance of healthy eating habits being established early in life and said that the schools should provide a good basis in healthy eating habits for children. One participant said, “You can turn kids on to healthy foods which can create a whole different lifestyle.”

Schools Purchase and Serve Produce from Local Farmers

Some parents were very excited about this idea. They spoke at length about the variety of produce grown in the area including strawberries, apples, corn, broccoli, cauliflower and peas and suggested that fruit could be frozen and later used in yogurts or jello for the children at school. Participants imagined that the school system would have a good deal of buying power in working out a food contract with local growers. They acknowledged that the local produce growers were not going to provide a good deal to the schools “out of the goodness of their hearts” and growers would have to be competitively compensated for their crops. One parent suggested that perhaps a work program for students could be created that would send them to work with local growers as an educational experience.

Adequate Time to Eat the Meal

Most parents did not seem to feel that the time allotted for eating in schools is a big issue and most seemed to feel it is adequate. In fact, some parents said that

more of an issue was their children's behavior in that they tend to spend their mealtime talking and not eating. Some participants suggested that it could be useful for the schools to advocate the importance of taking time for meals as a family. Others expressed concern about the community trying to get involved in helping people set priorities for their family life and telling people what is important. They suggested this would be like "opening a can of worms."

Reduce the Cost of Healthy Food Choices

While parents wondered aloud how reducing the cost of healthy food choices could be achieved, they acknowledged that the cost of healthy food seems to be "going through the roof" and said they would welcome the opportunity to purchase healthy foods more cheaply. They complained that the increases in food costs are out of proportion with wages. Some suggested that partnering with local growers might achieve success in bringing down the cost of healthy foods.

Regulate the Advertising of Junk Foods Sold at or Near School

Some parents recognized the strong presence of advertising of junk foods sold at or near schools and favored regulations. Others wondered whether any funding to the schools come from advertisers and worried about the possibility of undercutting that funding such as from pizza sales or vending contracts. They lamented that convenience stores near schools advertise everything from "beer to cigarettes to junk food." As one parent put it, "I don't think they can go to Mini-Marts and tell them what not to advertise... or maybe they can." Participants joked about the creation of a "junk free zone" around schools.

Restrict the Availability of Junk Foods in School

Parents were quite receptive to the idea of restricting the availability of junk foods in school. They suggested that schools send letters home with children reminding parents not to send certain types of food to school because of peer influence factors. Participants wondered why fundraisers that involve having children sell food to raise funds for school projects are typically unhealthy foods like chocolate bars. Parents suggested that healthy alternatives to junk food be provided specifically apple machines and vending machines that sell bottled water. As one parent put it, “I see no reason for there to be junk food in schools.” A couple of parents said they had issues with trying to restrict what kids bring to school but had no problem with ridding schools of junk food vending machines. Others said emphasis is better placed on making proper choices rather than on restrictions.

Nutrition Information Provided for Food Made in School

Parents were not sure that providing nutrition information for food made in school would have a large impact on the eating habits of children. Some felt that the children would not have an interest in that information but that it might reach some parents. Some worried about the cost versus benefit of doing this. One parent noted that they would have to “fix the menus before providing that.” Another suggested that this information would only be helpful if coupled with educational information about healthy diets.

A Vegetable Garden Program Offered

Parents were quite enthusiastic about this idea. They said it would be an excellent educational opportunity for kids and would probably increase the children’s interest in trying different types of vegetables. Said one parent, “It

would be good for kids to put their hands in the dirt.” They suggested that carrots, tomatoes and peas would be good crops for the garden.

Prohibit Access to Vending Machines During School Meals

While many parents think that prohibiting access to vending machines during meals is a good idea in theory and some advocate getting rid of them altogether, others cautioned about whether they would be getting rid of a source of school funding. Others reiterated that junk food should be replaced with healthy items like fruit making this a non-issue.

Ban Soft Drink Contracts in Schools

Parents said they were unsure of how contracts with soft drink companies affect funding to schools and again expressed concern about cutting funding to schools. Participants did think that it would be a good idea to get rid of all soft drinks in schools. Some participants drew a distinction between K-8 schools and high schools saying that while they agreed that pre-high school children should not have access to soft drinks in schools, that high school children should be able to make their own choices.

Changes that Would Cause Greatest Impact

Parents were asked to indicate which two or three of the possible changes would have the greatest impact on causing children in Mount Vernon to eat healthier.

Results were as follows:

- Seven (7) parents indicated that the following two choices would have the greatest impact:
 - *Greater availability of healthy foods offered in school cafeteria*
 - *Reduce the cost of healthy food choices*

- Five (5) parents indicated that the following choices would have the greatest impact
 - *Restrict the availability of junk foods in school*
 - *Ban soft drinks in schools.*
- *Growing a school vegetable garden* was indicated by two (2) parents.
- The following were noted by one (1) parent each:
 - *Schools purchase and serve produce from local farmers*
 - *Adequate time to eat the meal*
 - *Regulate the advertising of junk foods sold at or near school*
 - *Prohibit access to vending machines during school meals.*
- No parents indicated that *providing nutrition information on the food prepared and served in school* would have the greatest impact.

Changes that Would Cause Least Impact

Parents were asked which of the possible changes would have the least impact on causing children in Mount Vernon to eat healthier. Results were as follows:

- Three (3) parents indicated that *providing nutrition information on the food prepared and served in school* would have the least impact:
- Two (2) parents indicated that allotting *adequate time to eat the meal* would have the least impact.
- *Restrict the availability of junk foods in school, grow a school vegetable garden and ban soft drink contracts in school* were each indicated by one (1) parent.

Likelihood of Getting Children to Eat Healthier

Parents were asked to indicate on the same scale of 1 to 10, the likelihood of getting their children to eat healthier if the eight potential changes were made.

The average rating of likelihood to eat healthy dropped slightly (8.0 to 7.2 on the 10-point scale) from the rating provided prior to the discussion of the proposed changes. Six participants dropped their rating after the changes were discussed; three raised their rating and three showed no change. This could indicate that while the measures came close to matching parent’s expectations about what could be made easier about eating healthy, the measures did not excite parents to the extent that their ratings were higher after discussing the measures.

Table 1			
Likelihood to Eat Healthier			
<i>Parents of Children 1 to 9 years old</i>			
Group	Pre	Post	Difference
1	5	7	+2
1	10	10	0
1	8	8	0
1	10	8	-2
2	5	3	-2
2	9	9	0
2	8	6	-2
2	7	8	+1
2	8	4	-4
2	8	9	+1
2	10	7	-3
2	8	7	-1
Average	8.0	7.2	-.8
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre: If eating healthy were made easier for your children, how likely would they be to eat healthier? • Post: If these changes were made, how likely would your children be to eat healthier foods? 			

Children's Physical Activity

Barriers to Getting Regular Physical Activity

Participants were asked to identify barriers in their children's lives to getting regular physical activity.

Lack of time, poor weather and lack of covered play areas were mentioned as the primary barriers to regular physical activity by parents participating in the focus groups. Most participants seemed to feel their children maintain a healthy level of physical activity. A couple of parents complained about the high cost of sports activities sponsored by the Parks and Recreation department.

Likelihood of Children to Get More Regular Physical Activity

Parents were again asked to indicate, on a scale from 1 to 10 (10 meaning extremely likely) the likelihood of their children to practice regular physical activity if it were made easier to them.

Parents indicated a strong likelihood that their children would be more physically active if it were made easier for them. The average rating was 8.4 on the 10-point scale and only one (1) gave a rating below a five (5).

Table 2	
Likelihood to Get More Physical Activity	
Parents of Children 1 to 9 years old	
Group	Rating
1	7
1	10
1	10
1	7
2	5
2	10
2	10
2	10
2	8
2	7
2	8
2	9
Average	8.4
If it were easier for your children to be physically active, how likely would they be to become more active?	

Receptiveness to Physical Activity Changes

Seven changes that would potentially help children to be more physically active were presented to parents of children 1 to 9 years old.

Safe Walking and Biking Routes to School and in Your Neighborhood

While a number of parents seemed to feel that creating safe walking and biking routes to school is not possible, others responded very positively. Parents expressed concern about unsafe drivers and about the possibility of abduction. Some parents feel it is unwise for a child under the age of 12 or 13 to walk or bike unaccompanied to school. A couple of parents said there are safe biking routes in their neighborhood which do encourage physical activity and make the neighborhood a pleasant place to live with families. A number of parents said they would feel more comfortable about having their children out in the neighborhood if the lighting from streetlights was better.

PE Offered Daily in school

Most parents responded quite positively to the suggestion of a daily physical education program in school. They considered this a simple change that would make a good difference for children and would help performance in all subjects. Alternatively, some parents said that making sure there were plenty of recesses during the school day would achieve the same goal. A couple of participants who are teachers doubted that this would be realistic in the elementary schools where PE is now offered only once a week. Parents suggested that PE should emphasize fitness activities such as rock climbing, rollerblading, biking, and dance rather than competitive sports. Some parents seemed to feel that while required PE for small children is acceptable, older children should not be required to participate.

Increase Opportunities for After-School Programs with Physical Activity

While some parents expressed that there are plenty of after-school programs that promote physical activity, other said that this was important and cited research that shows that keeping kids on or near school grounds in organized activity keeps kids out of trouble. Parents repeated their suggestion that non-competitive activities should be offered in addition to sports.

PE Program That Promotes Activities Kids can do throughout their Lives

Parents were very receptive to this idea. As one participant put it, “As adults, my husband and I don’t get out and play football anymore. It would have been great if we had gotten involved early in hiking and other outdoor stuff.” Participants cited the number of children who are overweight and could obviously benefit from a PE program of this nature. They appreciated the fact that children could learn sports and activities that they would not learn otherwise (yoga, tai chi, hiking and canoeing were given as examples). One parent noted that indoor activities

should be emphasized as children's physical activity is often stymied by the weather.

Parks and Recreational Facilities Within Walking Distance of Home

While some parents said that they have parks and recreational facilities within walking distance of their homes now, others agreed this was an excellent concept. They said having parks and facilities close to home would increase their children's activity levels and would encourage them to accompany their young children to the park. When asked what walking distance means to them, some said as much as a 20 minute walk while others said 6 to 8 blocks depending on the topography was more realistic.

Free/Low Cost Physical Activity Programs Close to Home

Parents said they would greatly appreciate having access to physical activity programs closer to home. Some said taking the car to get to a park is an obstacle for them to do something with their children. The free or low cost aspect of this suggestion is really what parents want. Cost has been a major barrier for sport activities. Said one parent, "Most things start at \$45 and up. I can pick one or two for my kids but not as much as I'd like because of the cost." Parents suggested that the community make calls out to people to donate their skills to physical activity programs in their neighborhoods. Ideas such as offering dancing for children were especially popular among some participants.

Community Campaign to Reduce TV/Video Watching

While most parents thought this would be a good idea and mentioned that they had heard about other communities in which this concept had been successful, they agreed that it would have to be a broad-based community effort that offered alternatives and did not simply say, "kill your TV." Some parents seemed to feel that if other changes were made such as those being discussed, less television

watching would occur naturally. Parents acknowledged that some families have few alternatives to allowing their television to serve as a babysitter due to the need for two incomes and other financial constraints.

Changes that Would Cause Greatest Impact

Parents were asked to indicate which two of the possible changes would have the greatest impact on causing children in Mount Vernon to be more physically active. Results were as follows:

- Seven (7) parents indicated that offering *free/low cost physical activity programs close to home* would have the greatest impact.
- Five (5) parents indicated that the following changes would have the greatest impact
 - *Safe walking and biking routes to school and in your neighborhood*
 - *PE program that promotes activities kids can do throughout their lives*
- *PE offered daily in school* was indicated by four (4) parents.
- Three (3) parents indicated *increase opportunities for after-school programs with physical activity*.
- Two (2) indicated *community campaign to reduce TV/video watching*.
- None of the parents indicated that having *parks and recreational facilities close to home* would have the greatest impact.

Changes that Would Cause Least Impact

Parents were asked which of the possible changes would have the least impact on causing children in Mount Vernon to be more physically active. Results were as follows:

- Three (3) parents indicated the following changes would have the least impact:
 - *Safe walking and biking routes to school and in your neighborhood*
 - *Community campaign to reduce TV/video watching*
- Two (2) parents indicated that *parks and recreational facilities within walking distance of home* would have the least impact.
- *PE offered daily in school, Increase opportunities for after-school programs with physical activities and PE program that promotes activities kids can do throughout their lives* were each indicated by one (1) parent.

ADULTS AGES 40-65

Mount Vernon as a Healthy Community

Participants were first invited to share their general perception of Mount Vernon as a healthy community in which to live.

Similar to parents, Adults ages 40 – 65 seem to feel that Mount Vernon is basically a healthy community and is preferable in this regard to many other areas of the state. Some of the reasons participants believe Mount Vernon is a healthy community are:

- Weather that allows for a long growing season
- Proximity to varied outdoor activities
- Availability of well maintained parks and playfields
- Terrain is hilly which is healthy for walking and biking
- Close access to mountains and the ocean
- Access to numerous health clubs
- Hospital provides varied educational classes
- Low levels of traffic congestion compared to other areas.

Things that make participants feel Mount Vernon is not a health community include:

- Having industry in residential neighborhoods
- Increased crime and drug activity
- Having too many fast food restaurants
- There are not a lot of public athletic fields
- Poor road system and traffic congestion that makes walking and bicycling difficult and dangerous.
- Air is sometimes not fresh due to agriculture.

Eating Habits

Barriers to Eating Healthy Foods

Some of the common barriers to eating healthy foods among adults ages 40-65 are mentioned below:

- Few healthy restaurant choices
- Big chain grocers do not emphasize healthy foods
- Healthy foods are expensive
- Lack of education about nutrition and how to “eat healthy”
- Abundance of fast food restaurants
- Hectic schedule
- Lack of portion control

Likelihood of Eating Healthier

Adults ages 40-65 were asked to indicate on scale of 1 to 10 (10 meaning extremely likely) the likelihood that they would eat in a more healthy fashion if it were made easier for them to eat healthy.

All but one of the participants indicated that they would be at least somewhat likely to eat healthier if eating healthier were made easier for them. The average rating was 7.2 on the 10-point scale.

Receptiveness to Healthy Eating Changes

Seven potential changes that could encourage healthier eating habits were presented to adults ages 40-65. It should be noted that many participants seemed to have difficulty separating the impact these changes would have on their own eating habits from the impact they would have on the community.

Better Availability of Healthy, Ready to Eat Foods in Restaurants, Convenience Stores and at Snack Counters

Participants seemed to agree that it would be beneficial to have more quick options of healthy foods. Convenience stores offer few healthy offerings, according to participants although they noted that some restaurants (Subway and McDonald's) are offering at least some healthy menu items. Participants also noted "more and more shelf space is going to pre-packaged food." They wondered how stores could be convinced to offer these healthy, ready-to-eat foods and pointed out that people would still have to buy these foods in order for them to have an impact.

Have Local Restaurants or Stores Purchase and Sell Produce from Local Farmers

While some participants were receptive to this change and said they would prefer to buy local produce, others said, "It comes down to cost; if it's cheaper I'll buy it" and knowing that something was grown locally would not necessarily impact their purchasing decisions.

Offer Smaller Size Portions for Ready to Eat Foods and Drinks

Participants were not very receptive to the idea of small portion sizes. Many participants said they would be put off if offered small portion sizes particularly at restaurants. If portions are smaller, they reasoned, the cost should be substantially lower as well. Participants also noted that it is difficult to generalize

portion sizes for different people and added that it tends to be very expensive to buy pre-package single servings of food.

Provide Nutrition Information on Ready to Eat Foods or Food Served in Restaurants

Participants seemed to feel this would have a very positive impact and noted that there is a general lack of awareness about how to eat healthy among community members. One participant noted that the local hospital offers a nutrition class that takes participants into grocery stores and teaches them how to read nutrition labels.

Grow Your Own Produce at Home or in a Neighborhood Garden

Most participants did not seem to think that many people would take advantage of a neighborhood garden and only one participant mentioned having a vegetable garden at home. The said they would be concerned about their produce being stolen from a community garden and that many residential lots are too small for people to have a garden at home. Participants noted that there is a community garden in Mount Vernon but that it is not very well set up in that one has to bring your own water and that it is mostly used by people to grow flowers.

Reduce the Cost of Healthy Food Choices

This was probably the most favorably received of the possible changes. Participants said that cost has a great deal to do with the type of food they buy and that healthy foods including fruits and vegetables tend to be expensive. One participant noted that this change could result in not only money savings on food but on healthcare costs in the long run as well. Participants suggested that efforts be made to increase awareness of farmers who sell produce direct to the

consumer and added that the government should incent growers to lower produce prices.

Offer Healthy Food and Drink Choices in Community Vending Machines

Adults participating in the focus groups were positively disposed toward the idea of putting juice and fruit into vending machines in place of pop and candy. They said that vending machines offering unhealthy selections are a “big problem” in schools and in workplaces. When asked where they would like to see healthy vending machines, participants said they would like to see them in workplaces, and at gas stations and convenience stores.

Likelihood of Getting Adults to Eat Healthier

Adults age 40-65 were asked to indicate on the same scale of 1 to 10, the likelihood that they would be more physically active if the proposed changes were made. Ratings indicate that participants would be likely to be more active if the changes were made. Results were very similar to the ratings that were taken prior to the discussion of the potential ratings indicating that the changes suggested matched participant expectations of how being more active could be made easier.

Table 3 Likelihood to Be More Physically Active Adults Ages 40-65			
Group	Pre	Post	Difference
1	5	8	+3
1	7	6	-1
1	9	9	0
1	1	1	0
1	8	7	-1
1	6	6	0
1	6	7	+1
1	8	8	0
2	7	9	+2
2	10	10	0
2	10	8	-2
2	9	9	0
2	8	5	-3
2	7	5	-2
Average	7.2	7	-0.2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre: If eating healthy were made easier for you, how likely would you be to eat healthy? • Post: If these changes were made, how likely would you be to eat healthier foods? 			

Measures Expected to Have Most Impact

When asked which changes or measures would have the greatest impact, participants mentioned (1) *better availability of healthy, ready to eat foods in restaurants, convenience stores and at snack counters*, and (2) *reduce the cost of healthy food choices* as the measures most likely to have the most positive impact.

Physical Activity

Likelihood of More Physical Activity

Respondents were asked prior to seeing any measures about physical activity how likely they would be to become more active if that were made easier for them.

The average rating of 7.7 on the 10-point scale indicates that participants feel they would be more likely to be more physically active if it were made easier on them. Only 3 of 14 participants gave a rating of 6 or less.

Receptiveness to Activity Enhancing Changes

Safe Sidewalks and Trails for Walking in Your Community

Participants were very receptive to the idea of having safe sidewalks and trails for walking. While participants acknowledged that there are a couple of walking trails available, they added that it would be nice to have more. Said one participant, "I think it is great to see families walking together. This would be great for the community." Participants suggested that covering walking trails with saw dust is of great benefit to walkers' joints and makes walking during wet months more pleasant. A couple of participants mentioned that it frustrates them that the areas around the city's dikes are not open to the public as walking trails.

Safe Bicycle Paths or Lanes

Participants agreed that area streets are not safe for bicycles and they liked the idea of adding safe bicycle paths or lanes. Participants noted that getting bikes out of traffic would help with traffic safety and congestion in addition to being good for the bikers. One participant summed up the attitudes of others when she said, "We should be a more bike friendly community."

A couple of participants expressed reservations like, “Bike paths are nice and fun but they are very expensive for low volumes of bicyclists.” Participants suggested that developers be required to make bike paths part of their plans for neighborhoods.

Stores and Businesses Located within Walking Distance of Home

Most of the adult participants seemed to indicate that they did not like stores and businesses close to their home. They added they would be unlikely to walk to stores if they were close.

“I could walk to the store now but I don’t.”

“Usually when you go to the store you get too much to want to carry.”

In addition, participants mentioned that many businesses would not want to buy into residential areas because of the limits on growth and due to zoning restrictions.

Parks and Recreation Facilities within Walking Distance of Home

Participants felt that having parks and recreational facilities close to home would have a very positive impact on the community. They said that having parks and recreations within six blocks would be ideal. They noted that Mount Vernon needs more swimming pools in addition to neighborhood parks with walking trails, basketball courts and activity centers for small children. Participants again suggested that developers should be required to have neighborhood parks as part of any planning for new development.

Free or Low Cost Activity Programs that are Close to Home

Residents found the idea of having free or low cost activity programs close to home very appealing. They particularly liked the idea of offering community dances. They lamented the cost of current parks and recreation activities and said that low cost programs would be welcomed. Participants spoke at length about the need for community members to become acquainted with one another and they thought these activity programs could serve to bring communities closer together. Participants also suggested that school gyms be opened to the public on frequent occasions. Some of the programs suggested include the following:

- Aerobic classes
- Yoga
- Community dances
- Softball
- Block parties.

Community Campaign to Reduce TV/Video Watching

Residents thought that the TV was a problem mainly for younger people and that a community campaign would not work for adults. They added that any campaign should emphasize healthy alternatives to television watching. Others suggested using television to promote some of the physical activities being offered in the community.

Likelihood of Getting Adults to Be More Physically Active

Adults age 40-65 were asked to indicate on the same scale of 1 to 10, the likelihood that they would eat healthier if the seven potential changes were made. Ratings indicate that participants would be likely to eat healthier if the changes were made. Results were very similar to the ratings that were taken prior to the discussion of the potential ratings indicating that the changes suggested matched

participant expectations of how eating healthy could be made easier. It should be noted that only two participants provided a lower rating after the discussion of the changes and that one participant's rating dropped 5 points after discussing the measures. Six participants did give higher ratings following the discussion of the measures while six provided the same rating pre- and post-discussion.

Group	Pre	Post	Difference
1	8	8	0
1	5	6	+1
1	10	8	-2
1	10	10	0
1	6	7	+1
1	9	9	0
1	9	10	+1
1	7	2	-5
2	9	9	0
2	6	8	+2
2	8	8	0
2	6	8	+2
2	7	7	0
2	8	9	+1
Average	7.7	7.8	+1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre: If being physically active were made easier for you, how likely would you be to become more active? • Post: If these changes were made, how likely would you be to be more physically active? 			

Measure Expected to Have Greatest Impact

When asked which changes or measures would have the greatest impact, participants mentioned having *safe sidewalks and walking trails, safe bike paths,* and having *free or low cost physical activity programs close to home.*

Participants voiced their attraction to efforts that could be made to promote

community get-togethers and social interaction while emphasizing physical activity. A number of participants said that none of the changes would likely make a difference in their physical activity habits.

APPENDIX

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT PROFILE

TWO GROUPS EACH, PARENTS AND ADULTS *		
	12 Parents of 1-9 Year-olds	14 Adults, Age 40-65
Gender		
Men	6	6
Women	6	8
Age		
26-35	6	-
36-45	5	2
46-55	1	5
56-65	-	6
Living Area		
In Mt. Vernon	10	8
Outside Mt. Vernon	2	5
No answer	-	1
Self-assessment of Physical Fitness		
Very fit	1	3
Somewhat fit	8	3
Not very/not at all fit	2	6
Children at Home/ Ages		
# age 1-9	24	Not asked
# other < age 18	4	
Ethnicity		
Hispanic	4	1
Non-Hispanic	8	13
Employment		
Work full/part time	Not asked	9
Not working		4
Educational Level		
High school or less	3	2
Some college	4	7
College graduate	4	
Household Income		
<\$25,000	2	2
\$25,000-\$35,000	3	3
\$35,000-\$60,000	4	2
\$60,000 +	3	6

* Several categories add to less than 12 or 14 due to "no answer" or "refuse information."

Gilmore Research Group
Project C04034
Healthy Community

Skagit County (Mt. Vernon) Focus Groups Screening Questionnaire

RESP.

NAME _____ PHONE _____

=====
**CALL FROM TARGETED-MT. VERNON TELEPHONE LIST. ASK TO SPEAK
TO MALE/FEMALE HOUSEHOLD HEAD, OR ANYONE AGE 21+, AS
NEEDED.**

Hello, this is _____ with Gilmore Research Group. The City of Mount Vernon and Skagit County Health Department have joined together in a project related to physical activities and nutrition in your community. Gilmore Research Group, an independent opinion research firm has been asked to conduct a very brief study with people in the Mt. Vernon area regarding community health issues. We are not selling anything and my questions will take only about five minutes.

IF NEEDED

- The purpose of our study is to learn what concerns the residents of the Mt. Vernon community may have about health related issues. By this I mean how residents feel about the encouragement of environmental and policy changes, that would allow individuals to be more physically active and eat a healthier diet.
- This project is being sponsored by City of Mount Vernon and Skagit County Health Department, with support from Washington State Department of Health.

RECORD GENDER:	Male	1
	Female	2

RECRUIT A MIX, ABOUT 50/50 EACH GROUP

1. First, let me just verify, are you a resident of Skagit County?
() Yes CONTINUE
() No ASK TO SPEAK TO SOMEONE WHO IS; IF NO ONE SAY: Oh, I'm sorry; we're only talking with residents of Skagit County today.

1a. Is your home located within the Mt. Vernon city limits, or outside Mt. Vernon?

- In Mt. Vernon
- Outside Mt. Vernon, but still in Mount Vernon School district boundaries
- Outside Mt. Vernon, AND outside the Mount Vernon School district boundaries THANK & TERMINATE
- Not Sure THANK & TERMINATE

TRY FOR AT LEAST 2-3 OUTSIDE THE CITY FOR EACH GROUP.

2. What is your age, please? RECORD ACTUAL AGE, THEN MARK CATEGORY AND

CHECK QUOTA: _____

- Under 21 THANK AND TERMINATE
- 21-29
- 30-49
- 40-54 GROUPS 3,4
- 55-65 GROUPS 3,4
- Over 65 WE ARE TALKING WITH PEOPLE 65 YEARS OLD AND UNDER TODAY, SO THAT'S ALL THE QUESTIONS I HAVE FOR NOW. THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME.

3. How would you rate yourself, as to being physically fit. Would you say you are....(READ LIST)

- Very physically fit **Continue**
- Somewhat physically fit **Continue**
- Not very physically fit **Skip to Q 4**
- Not at all physically fit **Skip to Q 4**

3a. Can you please tell me what types of exercises you do, and how many hours you spend doing each of them in a typical week?

3b. For each "exercise" ASK, And how many times in a typical week do you _?

<u>Exercise</u>	Frequency (Hrs per week)	# of Times Per week
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
	Total Hrs: _____	

PROBE THOROUGHLY & WRITE DOWN DETAILS Respondent must NOT be spending more than 3 hours a week exercising. HOLD

anyone who lists going to the gym, running or working out (any type, aerobics, step class etc.) as one of their exercises.

HOLD those exercising over 3 hrs a week.

Note- We are looking for people who are NOT exercising for a health benefit. Work related exercise, caring for children, climbing stairs to get to the bus every morning etc., does not count as exercise.

4. Do you have any physical impairments that limit your mobility ?

RECRUIT NO MORE THAN 2 PEOPLE/GROUP WITH ANY PHYSICAL IMPAIRMENT. HAVING NO ONE WITH AN IMPAIRMENT IN A GROUP IS OK.

5. Are you currently ...READ:

- Employed Full Time
- Employed Part Time (20hrs a week or less)
- Self-employed
- A homemaker **Skip to 7**
- A student **Skip to 7**
- Retired **Skip to 7**
- Out of work or unable to work **Skip to 7**

6. What is your occupation, that is, what type of work do you do?

7. Do you have children under the age of 18, living at home?

- Yes → ASK Q. 7a. and Q8
- No → **Skip to Q9**

7a. Are these your children or are you caring for someone else's children?

- Mine/ours
- Someone else's (SPECIFY:)

8. Can you please tell me the ages of your children currently living in your household?

- _____
- Children 1-9 years of age AND "Mine/Ours" in Q7A: **Groups 1, 2**
 40-65 years of age WITH OR WITHOUT **OK for Groups 3, 4**

NOTE: WANT TO HAVE PARENTS IN GROUPS 1-2, PREFER NOT TO HAVE GRANDPARENTS. OLDER RESPONDENTS IN GROUPS 3-4MAY HAVE CHILDREN OR NOT.

9. What's the highest grade of school that you've completed?

- HS graduate or less
 Some college, community college, technical or trade school
 College graduate or beyond

10. Which of these categories best fits your total annual household income..READ 1 – 4:

1. Under \$25,000
2. \$25,000 to just under \$35,000
3. \$35,000 to just under \$60,000
4. \$60,000 or over
 DK/REF

RECRUIT A MIX IN EACH GROUP

11. Which of the following best represents your race or ethnic background?

READ 1-5

1. White
2. African American
3. Asian
4. Hispanic, Latino or Mexican-American **Skip to Invitation**
5. Or something else: Specify_____

12. Are you of Hispanic, Latino or Mexican-American decent?

- YES Hispanic
 NO Non-Hispanic

RECRUIT AT LEAST 3-4 HISPANIC FOR EACH GROUP

INVITATION

As further part of our research, we would like to invite you to participate in a focus group discussion regarding health issues and how Mt. Vernon area residents would like to see the city help citizens meet health goals. The group will be relaxed and informal, and you will simply be involved in an exchange of

ideas and opinions with 8 to 10 other people like yourself. These discussion groups are held for research purposes only, and will give you an opportunity to provide some input into this planning process.

The discussion will be held at _____ located at _____. The group will take place on [CHECK TIME/DATE BELOW]. It will last approximately 2 hours, and you will be paid \$50 cash in appreciation of your time.

Monday March 15th

Group 1: Parents of 1-9 yr olds (Mine/Own) 5:30
 Group 2: Adults Age 40-65 7:30

Skagit Valley Hospital; 1415 East Kincaid, Mount Vernon, in the Sauk Room

Tuesday, March 16th

Group 3: Adults Age 40-65 5:30
 Group 4: Parents of 1-9 yr olds (Mine/Own) 7:30

Skagit County Administration Building; 700 South 2nd Street, in Hearing Room B.

See Schedule Below.

13. Will you be available to attend this discussion? IF NOT, THANK AND END.
 1. Yes [SKIP TO END]

Parents of children age 1-9 (Mine /Own in 7A)	Location: _____	Group 1	Monday March	5:30p m
	Location: _____	Group 4	Tuesday March 16th	7:30p m
Mixed Adults, age 40-65	Location: _____	Group 3	Tuesday March	5:30p m
	Location: _____	Group 2	Monday March 15th	7:30p m

END: Wonderful, we're glad that you can participate. We'll be sending you a letter to confirm this invitation, along with driving directions. May I please have the correct spelling of your name and address? [RECORD ON FRONT PAGE] For this project, it is very important that we are able to count on your attendance.

If, for any reason, you find yourself unable to join us, please call us collect at 206-726-5567 as soon as possible so that we can try to get a replacement for you.

**PROMOTING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND HEALTHY EATING
IN MOUNT VERNON
DISCUSSION GUIDE**

**Among Parents: March 15th at 5:30pm
& March 16th at 7:30 pm**

INTRODUCTION

(Moderator introduces self, unbiased third party, and then explains:)

Purpose of the Focus Group:

We're conducting groups this week with people in the Mount Vernon community to understand the issues surrounding physical activity and healthy eating. Some of the groups will be people who have children and others will be people who don't have children. So our focus today is on the children that are 1-9 years of age.

The City of Mount Vernon is developing a Healthy Communities Project. The goal of the project is to make changes in our community that make it easier for people to be physically active and to eat healthy foods. To find out what these changes should be, we need feedback from residents such as you.. The goal of today's discussion is to select what change in policies or to your physical surroundings would result in the biggest impact on increasing physical activity or healthy eating among children in the Mount Vernon area. We'll discuss some ideas and would like to get your feedback about them, to see how effective they would be in changing your children's habits or the habits of children like yours with respect to physical activity and eating healthfully. So first we'll introduce ourselves, and then we'll go through these different topics one at a time.

Ground Rules/Disclosures:

Some viewers/listeners (identified as "assistants")
Taping, audio for my purposes
Use first names only for anonymity
Can only hear one at a time; speak up at same level as I am
No right or wrong answers, want your candid ideas, perceptions, and suggestions
We don't identify individuals when we quote ideas, but present the information in a combined form.

Respondent Introductions:

First name?
How many children living at home?
Your children's ages?
Your child's/children's favorite food or activity

WARM-UP/TRANSITION QUESTIONS

First of all, what makes you feel like Mount Vernon is or is not a healthy community?
(WRITE ON EASEL – IS on left, IS NOT on right)

What makes it hard for your children to eat healthy foods?

What makes it hard for your children to get regular physical activity?

Healthy Eating Options

HAVE PARENTS RECORD THE NUMBER ON THE SCALE ON A PIECE OF PAPER FOR THE RATING QUESTIONS, THEN DISCUSS VERBALLY.

If it was easier for your children to choose healthy foods,, how likely would they be to eat healthier?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10

not at all
likely

somewhat
likely

extremely
likely

Why do you think that is?

Look at the following list of changes. Which of these do you think would help your children to eat healthier in school or in daycare?

- greater availability of healthy foods offered in school cafeteria
- schools purchase and serve produce from local farmers
- adequate time to eat the meal
- reduce the cost of healthy food choices
- regulate the advertising of junk foods sold at or near school
- restrict the availability of junk foods in school
- provide nutrition information on the food prepared and served in school
- grow a school vegetable garden
- prohibit access to vending machines during school meals
- ban soft drink contracts in schools

If these changes were made, how likely would your children be to eat healthier foods?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10

not at all
likely

somewhat
likely

extremely
likely

ASK FOR EACH SUGGESTED: Why do you think that would make a difference
What other similar changes would make it easier for your children to eat healthier?

Physical Activity Options

HAVE PARENTS RECORD THE NUMBER ON THE SCALE ON A PIECE OF PAPER FOR THE RATING QUESTIONS, THEN DISCUSS VERBALLY.

If it was easier for your children to be physically active, how likely would they be to become more active?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10

not at all
likely

somewhat
likely

extremely
likely

Why do you say that?

Look at the following list of changes. Which of these do you think would help your children be more physically active?

- Safe walking and biking routes to school and in your neighborhood
- PE offered daily in school
- Increase opportunities for after-school programs with physical activity
- PE program that promotes activities kids can do through out their lives
- Parks and recreational facilities within walking distance of home
- Free/low cost physical activity programs close to home
- Community campaign to reduce TV/video watching

If these changes were made, how likely would your children be to be more physically active?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10

not at all
likely

somewhat
likely

extremely
likely

ASK FOR EACH SUGGESTED: Why do you think that would make a difference

What other similar changes would make your children more physically active?

Preferred Concept

Of all the suggestions made here, (WRITE DOWN) which would you think would be most likely to improve the health of your children either by encouraging them to increase their physical activity or to eat more healthfully? Why?

Least likely? Why?

Closing/Wrap up

(MODERATOR SUMMARIZES DISCUSSION, THEN SAYS:)

Our goal is to select a change (or two) to policies or to your physical surroundings that would result in the biggest impact on increasing physical activity or healthy eating in your community.

Have we missed anything? Do you have any other suggestions for us that have not been mentioned already?

THANK YOU!

**PROMOTING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND HEALTHY EATING
IN MOUNT VERNON
DISCUSSION GUIDE**

Among Adults: March 16th at 5:30 & 7:30pm (Hearing Room B)

INTRODUCTION

(Moderator introduces self, unbiased third party, and then explains:)

Purpose of the Focus Group:

We're conducting groups this week with people in the Mount Vernon community to understand the issues surrounding physical activity and healthy eating. Some of the groups will be people like you who may be working or homemakers or retired, and may or may not have older children living at home. So our focus today is on people in the middle stages of life from about 40 to 65 years of age.

The City of Mount Vernon is developing a Healthy Communities Project. The goal of the project is to make changes in our community that make it easier for people to be physically active and to eat healthy foods. To find out what these changes should be we need feedback from residents such as you. The goal of today's discussion is to select what change in policies or to your physical surroundings would result in the biggest impact on increasing physical activity or healthy eating among people in the Mount Vernon area. We'll discuss some ideas and would like to get your feedback about them, to see how effective they would be in changing your habits or the habits of people like you with respect to physical activity and eating healthfully. So first we'll introduce ourselves, and then we'll go through these different topics one at a time.

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No right or wrong answers, want your candid ideas, perceptions, and suggestions
We don't identify individuals when we quote ideas, but present the information in a combined form.

Respondent Introductions:

First name?
What work or main interest is?
If children living at home, how old?
Your favorite food or activity

WARM-UP/TRANSITION QUESTIONS

First of all, what makes you feel like Mount Vernon is or is not a healthy community?
(WRITE ON EASEL – IS on left, IS NOT on right)

What makes it hard for you to eat healthy foods?

What makes it hard for you to get regular physical activity?

Healthy Eating Options

If it was easier for you to choose healthy foods, how likely would you be to eat healthier?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10

not at all
likely

somewhat
likely

extremely
likely

Why do you think that is?

Look at the following list of changes. Which of these do you think would help you to eat healthier?

- Greater availability of healthy, ready-to-eat foods in restaurants, convenience stores and at snack counters
- Have local restaurants or stores purchase and sell produce from local farmers
- Offer smaller portion sizes for ready-to-eat foods and drinks
- Provide nutrition information on ready-to-eat foods or food served in restaurants
- Grow your own produce at home or in a neighborhood garden
- Reduce the cost of healthy food choices
- Offer healthy food and drink choices in community vending machines

If these changes were made, how likely would you be to eat healthier foods?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10

not at all
likely

somewhat
likely

extremely
likely

ASK FOR EACH SUGGESTED: Why do you think that would make a difference

What other similar changes would make it easier for you to eat healthier?

Physical Activity Options

HAVE RESPONDENTS RECORD THE NUMBER ON THE SCALE ON A PIECE OF PAPER FOR THE RATING QUESTIONS, THEN DISCUSS VERBALLY.

If it was easier for you to be physically active, how likely would you be to become more active?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10

not at all
likely

somewhat
likely

extremely
likely

Why do you say that?

Look at the following list of changes. Which of these do you think would help you be more physically active?

- Safe sidewalks or trails for walking in your community
- Safe bike paths and lanes
- Stores and businesses located within walking distance of home
- Parks and recreation facilities within walking distance of home
- Free/low cost physical activity programs close to home
- Community campaign to reduce TV/video watching

If these changes were made, how likely would you be to be more physically active?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10

not at all
likely

somewhat
likely

extremely
likely

ASK FOR EACH SUGGESTED: Why do you think that would make a difference

What other similar changes would make you more physically active?

Preferred Concept

Of all the suggestions made here, (WRITE DOWN) which would you think would be most likely to improve your health either by encouraging you to increase their physical activity or to eat more healthfully? Why?

Least likely? Why?

Closing/Wrap up

(MODERATOR SUMMARIZES DISCUSSION, THEN SAYS:)

Our goal is to select a change (or two) to policies or to your physical surroundings that would result in the biggest impact on increasing physical activity or healthy eating in your community.

Have we missed anything? Do you have any other suggestions for us that have not been mentioned already?

THANK YOU!