Memorandum

To: Chip Rerig, City Administrator

From: Ashlee Wright, Library and Community Activities Director

Subject: Public Knowledge Gained To Date From Community Conversations

Date: March 27, 2019

BACKGROUND

Following the methods for gathering public knowledge as described in the attached memorandum of September 1, 2018, the Library conducted six community conversations between August 2018 and March 2019. There were 57 participants, including members of the Harrison Memorial Library staff, the Carmel Public Library Foundation, the Carmel Women's Club, the Friends of the Harrison Memorial Library, Carmel Area Residents and Businesses(CARB), and the Community Activities Commission.

Throughout these conversations, we heard several themes coming up again and again: a desire for a connected and inclusive community; and concerns about social isolation, community fragmentation, and a lack of communication and follow through.

ASPIRATIONS FOR CARMEL

When asked what aspirations they had for their community, conversation participants focused on two main desires:

- A community that is connected, friendly and welcoming; that is characterized by neighborliness and companionship; where it is safe to engage and get to know each other. **"People want to feel familiar. We want to know each other."**
- A community that is open-minded and inclusive; that welcomes tourists, businesses, newcomers and part-time residents and actively integrates them into the community; that is open to new ideas and new ways of doing things. **"We're looking for an overall change in mindset, no more 'us vs them.' 'Our Carmel' instead of 'My Carmel.'"**

CONCERNS AND OBSTACLES

Participants repeatedly identified the following as major concerns in the community, and as obstacles to reaching their stated aspirations:

- The community feels splintered into adversarial groups who lack mutual understanding. **"[People here are] transient. Siloed, rather than connected. So many tourists, the**

local community feels diluted." "[This] used to be a really tight community. We knew each other...We got pushed out."

- The lack of neighborliness: people don't know or feel connected to each other. There is a general sense of isolation and loneliness. **"I've got no one I can borrow an egg from."**
- There is little common ground, a lack of physical places for people to go and interact. **"The community is behind closed doors."**
- A lack of communication, and a feeling of being uninformed of the events and services available in the community. **"There's a disconnect between people who want to do something and people who are offering that thing."**
- A sense that the voices of the community aren't being heard or acted upon. **"There's no connection between the voice and action. The City comes and listens to us, then doesn't do anything."**

ACTIONS THAT WOULD MAKE A DIFFERENCE

To support these community aspirations and ameliorate their concerns, conversation participants identified several courses of action:

- The creation and improvement of **gathering spaces**: free places for the community to gather and mingle without needing a specific purpose. Devendorf Park and Sunset Center were identified as underused resources that could be made more inviting.
- An increase in the number of **community events**, providing more opportunities for community members to come together and make connections. There is a desire for smaller, community-focused events sponsored by the City or local organizations (concerts in the park, street dances, etc.), and informal community events put on by residents and making use of the gathering spaces.
- The establishment of some sort of **community liaison** process/officer/program that would provide a central and stable point of communication between community groups/residents and the City, and establish a mechanism for feedback, follow through and accountability.
- The creation of a **Welcome Packet** sent to new residents that would collate information about local services, organizations, events, volunteer opportunities, etc., to help improve communication, build connections and integrate new residents into the community.
- The establishment of a **Community Ambassadors** program, through which full-time residents could reach out to part-time and new residents, and which could facilitate the organization of new community events and programs (e.g. block parties, neighborhood watch).

TRUSTED ACTORS

When asked which groups or individuals they would trust to take action on the issues and concerns raised, the conversation participants identified the following organizations:

- The **Harrison Memorial Library** was frequently nominated as a trusted organization and **"natural leader"** of community action, as it is considered **"non-political and non-threatening,"** and is already equipped with buildings, staff and training in outreach and organization.
- The **City**, including staff, councilmembers, and boards and commissions, was also named repeatedly as an organization trusted to affect change, as it is considered to have both the capacity (staff, expertise, budget) and the responsibility to work on solutions for these concerns. **"[These changes are the] City's responsibility, with community support."**

Other community organizations (Carmel Residents Associations, Chamber of Commerce, Women's Club, Carmel Foundation, etc.) were mentioned occasionally as potential trustworthy actors, but not as consistently.

CONCLUSION
The sense throughout all the conversations was of an enormous potential for partnerships and collaboration between the Library, the City, community organizations and community members. As the Library continues to engage the community in conversation we are committed to the following:
1. starting to explore how to build partnerships to achieve reasonable outcomes
2. engaging community members in the actual community conversation process as moderators and note takers
3. addressing "low hanging fruit" items that will demonstrate to the community that we are hearing what they are saying and that we can be trusted to act in the interim before the final public knowledge report is completed