

Kitchen Table Conversation Report

Name of Group/Organization: Lethbridge Public Library Management Team

Conversation Topic: Lethbridge at 100,000

Number of people in Conversation: 9

Date: December 13, 2016

Describe your Conversation: On December 13, 2016, Perry Stein and Andrew Malcolm, Community Planners with the City of Lethbridge facilitated a 100K+ Kitchen Table Conversation about “Lethbridge at 100,000.”

The conversation began by thinking about what we do well as a city currently, and where the areas are that we need to improve. Then, the conversation shifted to what trends and changes the participants have noticed in the past 10, 20 and 30 years of living and working in Lethbridge. The final portion of the conversation focused on the opportunities and challenges that face the City looking into the future—again, thinking about the next 10, 20 and 30 years.

The conversation did not have a specific “theme” (e.g., economic, social, environmental), but instead focused more generally on community outcomes such as inclusion, diversity and growth.

There was strong agreement in the group as to the main challenges and opportunities (sometimes two sides of the same coin) faced by the city, such as population and neighbourhood growth and growing cultural diversity.

The comments expressed below are not captured verbatim, but are meant to give a general idea of the conversation. Also, the views expressed are not meant to represent the opinion of the Lethbridge Public Library.

Question 1: What do we do well as a city today?

- Library is awesome!
- Green spaces (both in terms of numbers and variety)
- Bike repair station at the Library (Main and Crossings Branches) being installed seen as a proactive move
- Trail system
- Collaboration / working together / volunteerism in Lethbridge
- Education sector (two major post-secondary institutions)
- Seniors support systems
- Enthusiastic city – there are more and more things to do (e.g., festivals, events)
- Evolving arts City of Lethbridge
- Increasing supports for the LGBTQ+ community

Question 2: Where do we need to improve as a city?

- Need to provide library services beyond the two branches and bookmobile: need to look at a permanent location in the north and south
- Alternative transportation options

- Connections to destinations (such as the Crossing Library Branch) need to be improved
- Public Transit is not a viable option for many people because of cost, convenience, trip duration and operational times
- Chirping lights—need to provide audible / accessibility / mobility technology
- We need to do a better job as a community to communicate “what’s going on” to combat the “there’s nothing to do in Lethbridge” mindset
- Need to do a better job of integrated social groups (e.g., seniors, ethnic groups, new immigrants, people who have just moved to Lethbridge from other cities)
- Need more infrastructure to support the already existing performing arts community
 - We don’t have the capacity, but we do have the demand.

Question 3: What has changed in our city in the past 10, 20 and 30 years?

- Population, traffic, diversity have all increased
- West side expansion: we have grown out, not up
- We seem to be focused on low density... we are worried about sprawl
- Implications of the baby boom?
 - What is actually happening on the ground? Have we seen the boom in seniors that we have been anticipating?
- Diverse populations, but very isolated within own communities
 - Is this a change from earlier waves of immigration that saw the creation of cultural centres across the City? Or are our new communities just not at the same point yet?
- Library as a “gateway” to the community—we are doing this more intentionally now
 - Our capacity to do this has grown too
- More supports for LGBTQ+ (e.g., flag raising, events)
 - Contributions of groups like Outreach and GSA at the schools
- Newcomers to Lethbridge are challenged by the difficulty of breaking into the community and development social ties locally
 - People in Lethbridge want a made in Lethbridge approach, and resist outside ideas (e.g., sometimes the community pushes back on “outsiders” who come to Lethbridge for work)
- Very divided community
 - Geographically: N, S and W
 - Ethnically
 - Major decisions: e.g., curbside recycling
 - Demographics: seniors
 - Sometimes there is an assumption that “everyone knows Lethbridge”
- Traffic problems: infrastructure not keeping up with our growing pains
 - Do not have consensus on this topic as a community
- People not spending as much time at home as they used to—people are out and busy
 - Not Lethbridge specific
- There is a loosening of influence of more conservative elements in our community
- Seems to be more crime incidents—don’t know if this is reality or perception
 - Is this because of current economic conditions or city growing pains?
- Social supports strained (e.g., shelters, food banks)
 - Is this because of current economic conditions or city growing pains?
- Pace of sprawl is changing—seems to be increasing
- Neighbourhood associations are helping residents take on a more localized identity
- “Gotta lock your doors now”!

Question 4: What's next for Lethbridge?

- Going to face some crises that may force change upon us (e.g., drug addiction)
 - Growing pains—things may get worse before they get better.
 - We need to talk about these challenges more so we can overcome or avoid them
 - We also need to realize that these are “we” problems...not “them” problems.
- When do we start to have the critical mass to push change forward (not sure if we are there yet, but it seems like we may be at a crossroads)
- Spreading the positive aspects, actions and behaviours of organizations and community members is needed—we need to highlight the amazing things happening in our community (e.g., Cheers 4 Lethbridge is doing this)
- We need to focus on being an Intelligent Community—renewed focus on connectivity and seeing internet as a universal utility
 - Support business growth
- Need to start seeing and developing Lethbridge as a Tourism Destination in its own right, and not just a conduit to other places
 - We want people to visit Lethbridge for reasons other than visiting family/friends
- Need better airport service to help us become a destination
- We are a gateway to some amazing places (e.g., Writing on Stone, Waterton). Sometimes we forget that we are surrounded by such amazing places.
- Our community often takes a “middle class” view of services and don't see the challenges faced by others (e.g., affordability, accessibility)
 - We need to take a more holistic view
- We rely heavily on the automobile—we need to take a hard look at the transportation system to anticipate future changes, needs, trends (e.g., uber, car-sharing, cycling, public transit).
 - If we want to be multi-modal friendly, we need to develop the infrastructure and adjust servicing
- Changing “urban structure”
 - Need to be able to access local / neighbourhood commercial services (and not just convenience stores)
 - Sprawl
 - Food deserts
 - There is nothing new—just the same old commercial developments in every neighbourhood
 - We need to take a more neighbourhood focus
- Need more higher density developments
 - Location is key—as it is tied to convenience
 - Quality of the product is also important—people need to want to live there
 - Private amenity space is also important
- Home ownership is desirable
- We need to provide people with balance and options in their choice of housing
 - Some people want space, others don't
- Can't forget about managing parking as we increase density
- Need more taxi services and transit at peak times