



## Highlights from Brisbane's March 21 Community Conversation

On March 21, 2019 over 100 community members, council members and planning commissioners came together at the Mission Blue Center for an evening discussion about the future of Brisbane. This community conversation was jointly planned and sponsored by Home for All, a community collaborative addressing housing challenges in San Mateo County, the City of Brisbane and Common Knowledge.

This was the first community-wide forum since the passage of Measure JJ last November. Approved by 55% of voters, Measure JJ established new parameters for the development of the large Baylands property along Brisbane's bayshore. In her opening remarks, Mayor Madison Davis explained that the primary goal of the meeting was to provide community members with an opportunity to talk with each other about their hopes and concerns for the future and what they value about the Brisbane community. Councilmembers, Planning Commissioners, and City staff attended as listeners. Two short presentations set the context for two facilitated discussions at thirteen tables.



The meeting design recognized and built on several years of [community input](#) about the Baylands. Following the approval of Measure JJ, Brisbane City leaders want to ensure that community members have the opportunity to contribute ideas, help identify shared values and priorities, and deepen understanding of the opportunities and challenges presented by the Baylands development. A second community conversation on May 4 will provide more information about the City and community of Brisbane's role in the Baylands development as a prelude to future outreach by the property developer anticipated to begin this summer. Part of the upcoming May 4 meeting will feature a format that invites

participants to select which of the priority values and concerns that emerged from this March 21 meeting they want to discuss further with fellow community members.

Prior to the March 21 meeting, City staff conducted extensive community outreach to connect with people throughout the Brisbane community, including those who have not participated in previous conversations about the Baylands.

Of the 87 discussion participants who attended on March 21, about a third indicated that they did not usually attend City meetings. About one quarter of attendees said they worked or owned a business in Brisbane. Participants included those who have moved to Brisbane recently, as well as those who have lived in the community for more than 30 years.

During the outreach process, City staff interviewed local employers and employees who do not live in Brisbane, held conversations at playgroups with parents of young children, and reached out to multiple neighborhood associations.

This meeting summary includes input from the following sources:

- Perspectives and comments shared during the City’s multi-week outreach effort
- Emails received prior to the meeting from people who could not attend
- Table discussion notes from the 13 table facilitators
- Individual input and feedback forms that were turned in by 66 out of 87 discussion participants on March 21

## I. Presentation and Discussion #1 about Values and Challenges in Brisbane

Brisbane Community Development Director John Swiecki provided an [opening presentation](#) about the regional housing shortage facing Brisbane and all cities in San Mateo County, plus background information about local demographics and housing supply. He also provided the Five Guiding Principles that the City Council has adopted based on past community input as the backdrop for the first table discussion featuring these questions:

1. What do you value about living or working in Brisbane?
2. What challenges are affecting you and the people you know in Brisbane?



I want to retain Brisbane’s  
“small town” feel even with  
new Baylands development

- Participant



The table discussions and report outs indicated alignment with Brisbane’s Five Guiding Principles, while also adding more dimension based on the rich range of personal experience provided by the attendees.



## City of Brisbane's Five Guiding Principles

### Safe Community

Residents and visitors will experience a sense of safety

### Community Building

Brisbane will honor the rich diversity of our City (residents, organizations, businesses) through community engagement and participation

### Ecological Sustainability

Brisbane will be a leader in setting policies and practicing service delivery innovations that promote ecological sustainability

### Fiscally Prudent

Brisbane's fiscal vitality will reflect sound decisions which also speak to the values of the community

### Economic Development

Brisbane will work with businesses and residents to provide for economic vitality and diversity

### What we value about Brisbane

The following are highlights of participants’ comments and representative quotes:

- The location: “access to urban areas while feeling far from them”
- Small town feel: “a sense of community, knowing your neighbors”, friendly neighbors, close-knit community, walkability
- Natural beauty; great weather; “Peaceful community close to nature and mountains”
- Open space and outdoor recreation
- A feeling of safety
- Distinctive local personality: “Everyone’s a character”
- Quality services, library, lots of community events

### Frequently cited challenges

- Traffic; “The growth of the Bay Area is collapsing onto Brisbane.”
- Housing costs: “Increasing housing cost for both rentals and home ownership” “People are being priced out of Brisbane and have to move away;” “Lack of small, entry-level housing.”
- Too dependent on cars; lack of good transit
- Limited amenities: “Lack of retail, especially grocery stores.”
- Missing a high school
- Parking: “People are using their garages for their stuff and park on the street.”

Participants demonstrated that they value a strong sense of community and want Brisbane to be a warm and welcoming place. Yet there some different personal experiences with whether they felt included. For example, one person shared that “The small-town feel translates into a lack of openness to change, including with things, people and houses that are not considered the norm.” The appreciation for community events was balanced by people who also wanted more physical places to connect: “People on the Ridge neighborhood don’t have a place to meet.” “No local watering hole.”

## II. Presentation and Discussion #2 about Charting Our Future

The second presentation by Community Development Director John Swiecki provided an overview of how Measure JJ amended the City’s General Plan to establish broad parameters for future development of the Baylands. Actual development of the site will require the preparation of a Specific Plan and a Development Agreement that comply with the terms of Measure JJ and are approved by the City of Brisbane.



The Baylands property owner will be taking steps this summer to reach out to the community as part of preparing proposed plans. During the second discussion, community participants were asked to answer these questions:

1. As we think about Brisbane’s future, what kind of community do you want to live in? Why is that important to you?
  - What hopes do you have?
  - What concerns are coming up for you?
2. How can we work together to enhance Brisbane’s sense of community?



The responses, summarized below, are helping to shape a second community conversation on May 4 that will offer participants a chance to go deeper on the topics they care most about. Some of these topics will relate to the Baylands, while others may address actions that the City government and community can take. The community’s cumulative input about the Baylands will be a stepping off point for the developer’s subsequent outreach and planning work to start this summer.

### **Community members’ hopes for the future of Brisbane**

- To be able to keep the best of what makes Brisbane a strong community while addressing challenges: “[I hope that] the quirky, creative, environmentally conscious and community-oriented feel will be sustained and extended as we live into the next chapter of the City’s life.”
- Create a welcoming environment for new residents, attract people who like a community feel. “That we still have a heart for each other.”
- Provide a mix of housing, including more affordable, “neighborhood-oriented” housing. “The kids can stay and I can stay.”
- “People working in the Baylands will be able to live in the Baylands.”

Put politics and divisiveness aside and look at common interests.  
Find out how we can work together to create a vision for the future  
of Brisbane.

- Participant ”

- Improve walkability and transit options: “Safe connectivity such as biking and walking, to public transit; this can lead to embracing the community that we connect to and minimize the ‘us’ vs. ‘them’ mindset.”
- Environmental resilience; “Adapt, not react, to change such as climate change and growth.” That the “Baylands thrive.”
- Leadership in sustainability and regenerative energy.
- More open space, trails.
- “Increase resources: High school, Super Market, pharmacy, gas station, a bar.”
- Closer high school campus; “Educational access for children to grow up in Brisbane for the long-term.”
- Maintain quality City services

#### **Concerns about Brisbane’s future**

- “That the Village does not become a City.”
- “That we will have a “split community.”
- Traffic and increase in car trips, still too dependent on the car
- Housing affordability; “Locals squeezed out.” “More friends and family moving away, losing community.”
- Remediation: “I’m worried about the environmental questions about the ground contamination in the Baylands and whether people will be safe and healthy.”
- “Tension and uncertainty regarding development.” Cost of development on City: “That the maintenance and remediation for the Baylands project does not outweigh Brisbane’s ability to pay for it.”
- Noise pollution from local industry

#### **How can we work together to enhance Brisbane’s sense of community?**

Several participants talked about building bridges and connections, some literally as well as figuratively.

- Some attendees talked about physical connectors, walking bridges, corridors and trails to connect different parts of town. “Bridge the physical divide between downtown and developments.”
- Many demonstrated their desire to keep nurturing community connections: “Community depends on people who want to be part of a community; providing places and events for this to be possible is essential.”
  - “Have new people join community organizations.”
  - “Figure out ways to connect Ridge folks with the rest of town.”
  - “Combined Community meetings with music and food regularly.”

Throughout the meeting, as well in the pre-meeting input, participants demonstrated a strong connection to Brisbane. Some feel that it will be extremely difficult to maintain what makes Brisbane special with a development the size of the Baylands. “It’s impossible for me to imagine how the residential and commercial development on the Baylands would not make an already awful traffic situation here much worse,” shared one person who could not attend the meeting. Others expressed a different mindset: “I value the quietness of the town. I also don’t believe these things necessarily go away even if the town triples in size. We will still be a small town even with 12,000 people.” “Utilize positivity. What can we do to make and keep Brisbane great? Don’t fall into the skepticism loop.”



**Participants shared both comments and ratings in their feedback about the meeting:**

- About three quarters of the participants agreed that the information and discussion were useful and provided them with new perspectives.
- “Keep having these events and work hard to get newer residents here in greater numbers.”
- “Continue the format of this meeting.”
- People appreciated that it was “not contentious” and they were “able to share.”
- At the end of the meeting, when asked to summarize their feelings with one word, attendees frequently said “enjoyable,” “informative”, “fun”, “important”, “motivating.”
- Several suggested that future discussions include more families with young children, people working in Brisbane who do not live here and more residents who have moved to the City in recent years.

Everyone in Brisbane is encouraged to help spread the word about the next community conversation on May 4. All are welcome to attend this second community conversation, whether or not they attended the first one. The May 4 meeting is being designed so that new participants will be able to easily join the conversation, while also building on the first and work that has been done in the past.

**SAVE THE DATE**  
**Creating Community Together: Continuing the Conversation**  
Saturday, May 4 | Mission Blue Center | 475 Mission Blue Drive, Brisbane, CA  
2:30 p.m. Nacho Bar | 3–5 p.m. Community Conversation and Topic Sign-Ups

For more information about the May 4 community meeting, please contact Caroline Cheung at [ccheung@brisbaneca.org](mailto:ccheung@brisbaneca.org). We welcome your ideas about how to get more people engaged in this conversation.



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