Belle Haven Community Visioning
Communications and Engagement Strategy
March 2013

Introduction
The Belle Haven neighborhood lies within the City of Menlo Park, a predominantly affluent small city in San Mateo County. Belle Haven is geographically, demographically and economically distinct from the larger city. Its residents are not included in the Menlo Park School District; they are instead served by the Ravenswood School District. The Belle Haven population is less affluent, less educated and more ethnically diverse than the population of the City. The Belle Haven community has many assets, a strong sense of identity and a desire to improve its neighborhood.

The Belle Haven neighborhood and nearby commercial areas were previously part of Menlo Park's Redevelopment Area (RDA), the Las Pulgas Community Development Area. In 2012, under state law, RDAs were dissolved, resulting in significant budget cuts that have impacted the services the City is able to provide. Inclusion in the RDA allowed the City to provide a higher annual allocation of funds per resident to Belle Haven, compared to the City as a whole. Without RDA funds, the City's ability to provide services levels at previous levels is compromised, and cost-cutting measures – such as the elimination of the Housing Department – have been put in place. Major land use changes are also underway near Belle Haven, including Facebook's relocation to the Willow Road East Campus and West Campus Expansion and the approved mixed-use Menlo Gateway Project.

Although Belle Haven has been involved in previous planning and priority-setting efforts, these changing circumstances led City Council in 2012 to support a neighborhood-wide Community Visioning process to ensure the City provides resources to the highest-priority services as defined by the Belle Haven community. This effort will also seek to organize and position the community to work effectively with the City to advocate for its needs and priorities, and identify opportunities for the neighborhood to benefit from changing neighborhood dynamics and new resources.

This strategy will create a community visioning process that is:
-opportunity-driven
-place-based
-cost-effective, and
-action-oriented.

Project Milestones

The visioning process will be approximately six months and designed to reach the following milestones in 2013.

January	Project initiation and kick-off
March	Local outreach staff hired
April / May	Neighborhood outreach conducted
June	Neighborhood priorities identified
July	Final Vision and Action Plan completed

Community Issues and Priorities

In 2012, the City completed two efforts to better understand the conditions and priorities of the Belle Haven neighborhood – a Community Snapshot and Community Conversations. The Community Snapshot provided a demographic profile of the neighborhood, and the Community Conversations highlighted key issues and priorities for the neighborhood through stakeholder interviews.

The findings from these recent efforts provide the foundation for the 2013 Community Visioning Process. From this work, conversations with City staff, and a community kick-off meeting held in January, the following have been identified as key issues and priorities for the Belle Haven neighborhood:
- Limited resources and high demand for community services
- Public safety and recent violent crime
- Education and school opportunities, including disparities between the Ravenswood and Menlo Park School Districts
- Gentrification and displacement as a result of increased commercial activity and investment
- Lack of coordination between community groups
- Divisions between the Belle Haven neighborhood and the rest of Menlo Park
- Need for broad-based engagement and representative participation from the entire Belle Haven community

Communications and Engagement Goals

The following goals and objectives will guide the Belle Haven Community Visioning Process.

Community Education: Provide clear information from the City and outreach team to residents regarding the project purpose, community service funding and provision and other related topics.
- Articulate the need for a visioning process to provide guidance to City Council about funding and service decisions

- Help residents better understand how City services are funded and provided
- Address misunderstandings about resource allocation and service levels
- Identify opportunities and strategies for working effectively with the City to advance neighborhood goals
- Engage leaders from other departments and agencies (including the School Districts and Police Department) to address issues of concern to the neighborhood that are outside the purview of Community Services

Public Input: Obtain information from a broad representation of the Belle Haven community to help guide and inform City decision-making.
- Use a variety of outreach methods and tactics to provide multiple opportunities for engagement and allow residents to participate at a level and in a manner in which they are comfortable
- Provide translation and interpretation for all outreach materials and activities
- Work with trusted local residents to encourage participation in the process and access existing community networks
- Identify and rank community priorities for community services
- Identify neighborhood assets and resources that will support implementation of the Community Vision
- Identify issues, challenges and needs related to other community stakeholders, e.g., Facebook, Menlo Park Police Department, absentee landlords, school districts and area non-profits

Organizing and Capacity-Building: Position residents and community groups to work effectively with the City and other stakeholders after the visioning process concludes.
- Identify and engage individuals willing to serve as neighborhood leaders and community ambassadors
- Create paid part-time employment opportunities for Belle Haven residents
- Provide training and resources to local outreach staff and volunteers
- Engage community organizations and identify ways to work together efficiently and effectively to pursue common goals
- Develop a structure and framework for future action to guide the Belle Haven community's work with the City
- Provide a list of prioritized actions for the community to follow up on

Target Audiences

Belle Haven Residents

The primary task of the Belle Haven Community Visioning process is to allow the City to hear from residents of the neighborhood about their needs and priorities. Therefore, the primary audience for communications and engagement strategy is residents of the Belle Haven neighborhood. This includes homeowners as well as renters; all age groups including youth and seniors; and members of all ethnic groups, regardless of language ability.

Belle Haven Businesses and Employees

Belle Haven business owners, employers and those who work in the neighborhood are also an important group to engage in this process, as they have a unique and valuable perspective to add to the community conversation.

Youth and Students

Young people in Belle Haven are an important target audience to engage in the visioning process as they have a strong stake in the neighborhood and its future, and may have different perspectives and information than members of older generations. Youth and students will be engaged in the process through community conversations and questionnaire exercises in their classroom, after-school program or other appropriate settings.

Belle Haven Faith-Based Groups and Community Organizations

Local faith-based groups and community organizations have existing communication and organizational structures that allow them to easily reach residents. Yet, these groups often work in silos, with little communication between each other. This process should emphasize inter- and intra- group communications to develop a shared agenda for neighborhood improvement efforts.

Other Community Leaders

Current and emerging leaders from Belle Haven, including residents, community groups, school administration and City staff will need to be engaged throughout the process. Their leadership and involvement will be instrumental in implementing the Vision and Action Plan.

Menlo Park Residents

While the purpose of the visioning process is to identify the priorities of Belle Haven residents and business interests, residents have identified the need to bridge the gap between Belle Haven and other Menlo Park neighborhoods. To this end, all Menlo Park residents will be a target audience for general information about the project.

Messaging Framework

The communication tools and messages for this project will be designed to achieve two general goals:

1. Inform the target audiences about the community visioning process to ensure a transparent process, including:
    a. Why the City has undertaken this effort;
    b. What the process will entail;
    c. What the goals and objectives of the process are;
    d. Who is involved in the visioning process;
    e. How information will be gathered and shared with the City; and
    f. When project milestones will occur.

2. Share information and educate stakeholders about key issues, including
    a. Community service provision and resource allocation
    b. Existing City programs and efforts that support the Belle Haven neighborhood
    c. Opportunities to engage with the City to influence decision-making
    d. School district structure and history
    e. Ongoing public safety concerns and responses
    f. Opportunities to work with other community stakeholders to benefit the Belle Haven neighborhood

Recommended Tools and Tactics

The following section outlines MIG's recommended approach to communications, engagement and outreach for the Belle Haven Community Visioning process. Specific communications tools and tactics were selected to best implement the goals and objectives above. The proposed strategy provides multiple opportunities for residents to share their ideas and opinions in a variety of ways and at different levels of commitment.

Outreach Toolkit

An Outreach Toolkit will be developed for use by local outreach staff. An Outreach Toolkit is a simple but effective "meeting-on-the-go" resource that equips staff and volunteers to share information, obtain public input and guide conversations in a variety of settings.

The Belle Haven Visioning Outreach Toolkit will include:
- A facilitator guide with best practices and guidelines for leading small group discussions and administering questionnaires

- Reporting forms to track participation, demographics and community input
- Print questionnaires and large-print questionnaires
- A one-page Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document about the Visioning Process
- A Fact Sheet providing clear, detailed information on the Belle Haven neighborhood history and community services funding and provision.

Community Questionnaire

The questionnaire will be the main tool used to obtain quantitative data from residents and will be structured to facilitate data management and reporting. It will include targeted questions about community priorities, needs and issues. It will also gather information on how residents prefer and are willing to work with the City and what level of commitment they are willing to make to the ongoing implementation of the community vision. These questions will be developed in consultation with the City and be designed to provide clear information to City Council and City staff.

The community questionnaire will be an element of the Outreach Toolkit as well as a stand-alone document for distribution throughout the neighborhood. Questionnaires will be distributed both in print and electronically and in Spanish and English. MIG will include mechanisms such as numbering questionnaires, color-coding print versions and tracking IP addresses for data quality control and to ensure that data is not manipulated (e.g., by an individual submitting multiple questionnaires).

Printed questionnaires will be distributed and gathered by the outreach team and City staff. A drop-box or other collection tools will be provided at facilities in the Belle Haven neighborhood. This will allow City staff to collect, scan and save copies of each questionnaire received and send an electronic version to MIG. This will ensure quality control as well as transparency of the public input process by documenting and backing up original data.

Canvassing

Input received from the Community Conversations and Kick-Off Meeting suggests that canvassing the Belle Haven neighborhood is an important way to inform the Belle Haven community, encourage broad participation and attempt to include all residents in the process. Canvassing interactions also allow a participant who is less comfortable with written materials to ask questions and provide their answers verbally to the canvasser. MIG recommends that local outreach staff conduct door-to-door canvassing with print questionnaires and the FAQ and request that questionnaires be completed at that time, or within an hour for pickup (e.g., under a doormat). Flyers that direct interested residents to find more information or complete a questionnaire online can be left at homes where no one answers the door.

MIG will work with the City to identify the most appropriate plan for neighborhood canvassing, considering the neighborhood layout, staff comfort, and safety concerns expressed by the Menlo Park Police Department. All canvassing will be conducted during daylight hours.

Community Conversations
Several small group discussions or community conversations will be held throughout the Belle Haven neighborhood. These will be organized among different stakeholder groups as well as neighbors, friends, and other social networks. These conversations will be facilitated conversations led by City, MIG, local outreach staff or community volunteers who attend the outreach training. These conversations will allow an exchange of information between participants as well as more in-depth input. They will be the primary source of qualitative information during the neighborhood outreach phase.

Facilitators will be given a discussion guide and reporting forms in their Outreach Toolkit that can be used to guide community dialogues in a variety of settings and with different time constraints. These conversations can be scaled from 15-minute to one-hour meetings. Small group discussions will be planned and held in locations that are accessible and comfortable for each group. It is anticipated that MIG or City staff will attend a small number of community conversations to support or shadow, but that many of these will be led by outreach team members or community volunteers.

Preliminary recommendations for stakeholder groups to organize for small group discussions include:
- Belle Haven Community Foundation
- Belle Haven HOA
- Hamilton Park HOA
- Local faith-based leaders
- Youth and students
- Business owners
- Local school officials
- Community-based service providers
- Emerging ethnic communities and other stakeholder groups

Community Workshops and Events
MIG will work closely with City staff to plan, organize and hold two community-wide events.

The first event will be a Spring Community Fair held in March or April. This event will be family-oriented and festive and serve to energize the community and encourage participation in the visioning process. The event will be designed to provide information

on services and community resources to residents as well as gather input into the visioning process. This open-house style event may include the following elements:

- Small group presentations and Q&A about the visioning process held periodically throughout the event
- Mapping exercises where residents can identify neighborhood challenges and assets as well as outreach opportunities
- An interactive neighborhood history exercise where neighbors can illustrate the evolution of the Belle Haven neighborhood
- Information booths or tables staffed by:
  - School district representatives
  - Community service representatives
  - Menlo Park Police Department staff
  - Menlo Park Community Services Department staff
  - Community groups
  - Youth groups
  - MIG and local outreach staff

Participants will be able to complete comment forms or questionnaires and sign up to participate in future outreach events, including small group discussions, or to join the Belle Haven mailing list. Child care and food will be provided. Optional activities may include games or activities for children and a photo contest.

The second event, held in June, will be a more traditional workshop, with presentations of the outreach findings and Vision Framework. This will be an opportunity for the neighborhood to review and comment on the draft vision before it is finalized and to provide input into the action plan, including identifying neighborhood assets and resources. Local outreach staff and community volunteers will have active roles in the meeting agenda. Participants will be asked to make a commitment to continue their involvement implementing the Vision and Action Plan using a pledge card or similar tool. This event may also include presentations of the neighborhood history timeline, asset map and photo contest.

Other Communication Tools
- MIG will develop a Community Vision Newsletter template that will be updated two or three times during the course of the visioning process and can be used by the City after the conclusion of the 2013 effort. This document will provide a "snapshot" view of work to date; report to the community of what work has been done; summarize key themes heard; and highlight upcoming events and opportunities for participation. The newsletter can be distributed electronically as well as printed and distributed at City offices and public gathering spaces. It can also be mailed to residents who do not use computers or e-mail.

- MIG will also provide bi-weekly e-mail updates to the mailing list to keep interested community members up to date on project progress. This content can also be mailed to residents who do not use computers or e-mail upon request.

- Questionnaires, FAQs and Fact Sheets can be distributed throughout the community at public gathering places such as the senior center, community school and in local businesses.

- The City will create a page on its website and provide periodic updates on the visioning process.

- The City may also use other online tools, such as Peak Democracy, as appropriate, to engage the broader Menlo Park community.

Roles and Responsibilities

The success of the Belle Haven Visioning process depends on collaborative participation by the City, consultant team and Belle Haven community members. The following outlines the key responsibilities of each, while recognizing that ongoing communication, coordination and adaptation will be critical to the project's success. Both MIG and the City will consider input and feedback from the community at all stages in the process.

The City is responsible for:
- overseeing all consultant team work, including reviewing draft materials, documents and meeting agendas
- advising the consulting team on the communications and engagement tools and tactics to be used
- disseminating information to established communications and outreach networks
- posting project updates and materials to the City website
- responding to resident inquiries regarding the visioning process
- providing logistical support for events and meetings
- translating and interpreting communications into Spanish or other languages as needed
- Communicating with MIG on issues, challenges and emerging concerns as needed

The MIG team will:
- finalize the communications and engagement strategy with City input
- develop an agreed-upon set of communications and outreach tools
- hire and supervise Belle Haven residents as outreach associates during the project period in consultation with designated City staff

- respond to resident inquiries regarding the visioning process
- train and provide resources to the local outreach staff and community volunteers
- shadow local outreach staff on a limited number of outreach activities
- document and report public input
- draft e-blasts, newsletter content and other written materials
- draft and finalize the Vision documents and Action Plan
- Communicate with the City on issues, challenges and emerging concerns as needed

The local outreach team will be responsible for:
- conducting outreach activities in the Belle Haven neighborhood
- collecting and reporting input from community members and groups
- serving as community ambassadors to the consultant team and City
- remaining neutral and objective while gathering community feedback
- pursuing traditional and non-traditional avenues of outreach to ensure all perspectives and voices are represented
- communicating with MIG and the City on issues, challenges and emerging concerns as needed

The role of Belle Haven residents and community groups will be to:
- share information about the visioning process with their friends, families and networks
- provide input, ideas and opinions with the outreach team
- host, attend and/or invite others to participate in small group discussion
- attend community events to gather and share information
- provide feedback and input to MIG and the City throughout the visioning process
- commit to supporting and implementing the Community Vision and Action Plan by staying involved throughout the process and after July 2013.

Data Collection, Monitoring and Reporting
To ensure a transparent process that is reflective of community input and to build trust between Belle Haven neighbors and the City, MIG and the City will carefully document, summarize and report back outreach activities and outcomes throughout the process.

All tools and templates will be designed to facilitate the documentation of outreach efforts as well as collection and analysis of input. This will allow for efficient use of staff time and easy reporting. Timely, easy-to-understand summary reports contribute to transparency and build trust in the public process. These strategies also ensure that a variety of viewpoints are represented and reported, even if some groups or viewpoints dominate a particular event. Evaluation and documentation also maintains and grows stakeholder lists and informs and improves future outreach programs.

The following tools will be used to track, report and document activities and input throughout the visioning process:

- the Community Vision Newsletter
- bi-weekly e-mail blasts
- website updates
- meeting summaries
- archiving original comment forms and questionnaires
- small group meeting reporting forms
- anecdotal and other qualitative input from residents
- online questionnaire software reports
- a Community Report summarizing the findings of all outreach and engagement activities with detailed appendices
- the Vision Framework and final Community Vision documents.