The Community Engagement Task Force Co-Chairs, Edith Benkov and Reggie Blaylock introduced themselves and welcomed the Open Forum attendees who included SDSU faculty and staff and members representing all four working groups.

Reggie described the purpose of the Open Forum and explained the importance of their feedback in deciding what the Task Force will finally decide to put forward as their suggested initiatives. He encouraged them to fill out the feedback forms made available that night, to take some home and forward later and/or to post comments at the Strategic Planning website.

Initially it was thought that the group would divide into the four Working Groups that are under the umbrella of Community Engagement: K-12 Partnerships, Alumni Engagement, Campus Climate and Economic Development with a member from each group leading the discussion. As the goals of each of these groups were described it became apparent that our community partners preferred to discuss the topics under Campus Climate and the discussion continued with the group as a whole.

Marian Liebowitz from the Campus Climate Working Group passed out a written summary of what had been distilled from the three committee meetings and three open forums previously held by the group. To accommodate the community members that had to leave early the discussion began with the topic that addressed the neighborhoods surrounding the campus.

A community member reported that he has volunteered at SDSU for ten years and while he has enjoyed it and recommends it to others, getting on campus is a struggle. Parking is the main issue. He suggests a community parking sticker and developing more bike paths to ease access.

Parking continued to be discussed by the group and some of the ideas suggested were: free parking on the weekends, free parking tied to events, and a community permit. It was observed that the parking situation discourages community participation at events on campus and that free parking would also encourage volunteerism.

The demise of SDSU Universe (electronic communication tool) was lamented as the classified section was very useful and it was not as insular as the Newscenter that has replaced it.
This led into a discussion of off campus housing and the need to educate students on fair housing practices; especially since students could be adversely effected if their landlord does not comply with the permitting processes for homes with 5 or more occupants.

An Off Campus Housing Coordinator position was suggested to direct students to reputable landlords and ensure students know their rights.

A community member observed that generally the public sees living near a university as a negative due to the news reporting only problems and not the benefits. He and his neighbors have a positive view of what the campus has to offer and that it could be even greater if access was improved.

Another community member stated that it seems that faculty and staff are not made aware of the lovely neighborhoods near campus and she has even heard realtors say that the area is not good for families. The campus could do something to help in that regard.

Marian Liebowitz brought up the idea of an Angie’s List type of compilation of preferred vendors and property owners and the possibility of negotiating discounts for SDSU personnel. The community members agreed that it would be useful.

The discussion then moved to awareness of events on campus. The general consensus was that if you were interested in something you would search it out but it is quite likely that other events would not come to your attention. Edith Benkov observed that the Campus Climate Working Group has discussed this at length and even though upcoming events are listed on the SDSU homepage it is a short term listing.

Many events go by without interested people knowing of them and the Events Calendar does not list them all. Many departments maintain their own events calendars and it was suggested that possibly funneling notices of all events to a single source may increase awareness and attendance.

As some community members had to leave Reggie thanked them for their participation and noted their concerns are well documented having been heard from other groups on campus and that communication and getting information out to people is a high priority.

The discussion turned to improving alumni engagement and improving the amenities on or near campus such as a fine dining restaurant and encouraging farmer’s market type vendors. Reggie observed that when the new Student Union is operational more services will be available.
Marian led a discussion of best kept secrets about the campus and asked the group to name their favorites. The ARC, the Aquaplex, art exhibits, the costume shop, the music and theatre department offerings were mentioned.

A community member mentioned that she is able to use computers in the library, check out books and use many other library features with her guest card.

Other ways to encourage community involvement in the campus included suggestions of “Community Days” a few times a year, “Community Appreciation Day”, invitations to a few key events, the Alumni Newsletter, resumption of the “C” parking pass and the ability to purchase a book of coupons that can be used at campus retail and events.

The co-chairs wrapped the open forum thanking the participants for coming out and encouraging all to provide feedback.