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Our Puget Sound Millennials: Natural beauty attracts them here, but they're daunted by the high cost of living. To afford the life they want, many fear they'll have to leave.

First-of-its-kind survey across King, Snohomish and Pierce counties polls nearly 1,200 young adults

Contact:

Michael Beneke
VP of Communications
Forterra
206-204-8059 | 206-250-4993 (cell)

How does Seattle's high cost of living impact millennials? Can they afford to put down roots? Do they even want to? And how will their actions shape the growth of our cities as well as our suburbs?

Answers to these questions emerge in a first of-its-kind study of Puget Sound millennials (people between the age of 18 and 35) conducted in the fall. With more than 400,000 millennials, King County [is second only to Brooklyn](#) in percentage of young adult residents. It's also second among big counties nationwide in the percentage of people who moved in the past year from another state.

[The Livability Survey for Puget Sound Millennials](#) was conducted by Forterra, a regional sustainability nonprofit, together with EMC Research, a pollster. The survey garnered input from 1,168 local millennials [300 interviewed by phone; 868 who filled out an online survey.* By way of comparison, a recent [national poll](#) by the Pew Research Center surveyed 617 millennials in total.]

With the Livability Survey, we now have a more detailed picture of local millennials than ever before—both new arrivals as well as those who grew up here.

“For an organization like ours, intent on creating a region where both people and land thrive, it's vital to know the values of our surging millennial population,” says Gene Duvernoy, president of Forterra. “Among the sobering findings is that **the spiraling cost of living in Puget Sound could push millennials out** — along with all their education and talent. It's one thing if ‘out’ means the suburbs. It's another thing if ‘out’ means out of the region.”

So, what does the survey tell us?
(Detailed charts of the findings can be found in an accompanying PDF):

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- While they're highly positive about the direction of the community (67% right track/23% wrong track), they're concerned about the high cost of living—especially housing.

TOP LOCAL CONCERNS?

MILLENNIALS	EVERYBODY
1. Affordable housing/cost of living (12%)	1. Traffic/Transportation (32%)
2. Traffic/Transportation (10%)	2. Affordable housing/cost of living (11%)
3. Homelessness (8%)	3. Homelessness (9%)
4. Inequality/racism (7%)	4. Growth/overpopulation (6%)
5. Education (7%)	5. Pollution/environment (5%)

*March 2016 survey of registered voters in the Sound Transit District, conducted by EMC Research.

- Affordability is in fact local millennials' top concern. The top concern of Puget Sound adults overall? Traffic.

SHOULD I STAY OR SHOULD I GO?

- Millennials love it here — particularly the nature, the mountains, the outdoors, and the beauty.



- Overwhelmingly (87%) they want to stay long-term. But nearly half say that to afford the kind of life they want they may need to move to a place with a lower cost of living.
 - *Among those more likely to say they would need to move away to afford the life they want: women and people in their mid-twenties.*
 - *The Puget Sound millennials most worried about affordability? Those living in Snohomish County.*

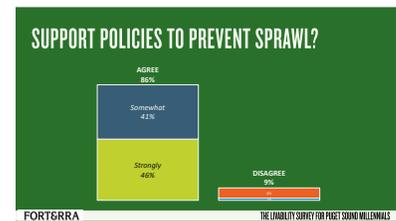
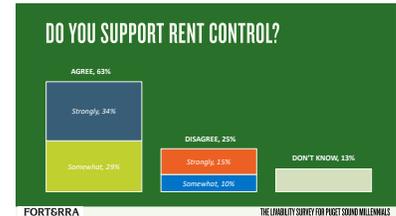
WON'T YOU BE MY NEIGHBOR?

- Asked about their ideal neighborhood, Puget Sound millennials cite easy access to parks and wild places, proximity to good public schools, and a short commute to work or school.
 - *Much lower on the priority list: easy access to clubs, restaurants and galleries.*
- Living in a diverse community also ranked high, especially compared to the priorities of all adults nationally.
- Having a large home? That's the least of millennials' preoccupations. Though millennials who grew up here are somewhat more interested, as are millennials who work in tech.
- Half of all millennials who are new to the area would rather rent instead of own if it means they can live in a close-in neighborhood. But millennials who grew up here are much more ownership-minded, and they'll move farther out if that's what it takes.
 - *Whether newcomers or long-timers, millennials who are parents are much more oriented toward home ownership.*



SLOW DOWN, DON'T YOU GROW SO FAST

- Two-thirds of long-time area millennials say the pace of growth is too fast, and housing construction should slow down. Just 37% of newer millennials say that.
- Conversely, long-time area millennials say that growth and increasing density benefit everyone (55%), while newer millennials think it primarily benefits developers and is generally making life harder (47%).
 - *Among those who are the most OK with growth: tech workers.*
 - *Those who are the most pessimistic about growth: millennials in their mid-to-late 20s (in other words, those most set back by the Great Recession).*
 - *The millennials who are the most vocal about how things are changing too fast in their neighborhoods: those in Pierce County*
- Millennials, generally strapped for cash, overwhelmingly want rent control.
- Concerned as they are about cost of living, millennials emphatically don't want affordability to come at the expense of sprawl. Well over 80% say this.



Implications of the findings. *Gene Duvernoy, president of Forterra, observes that:*

“With our fast-growing population of educated, highly-skilled millennials, we’re the envy of the nation. The creativity and entrepreneurial spirit of our young adults promises a bright economic future for our region — but only if we keep them. The beautiful surroundings and the diverse and vibrant community make them want to stay. But there’s a real risk that they won’t considering their acute worries about affordability.

“Will we become a cost-prohibitive place like San Francisco or New York — attractive to recent college grads, but only for a couple of years before they move on? If so, what will we sacrifice, both in talent and civic involvement?

“We also need to consider the potential divide between newcomer and long-time millennials, who appear to bring very different expectations to living here. Will long-time millennials flock to the suburbs (fulfilling their desire for home ownership), while newcomer millennials stay closer in (fulfilling their desire for a more urban life). Or will parenthood eventually send everyone outward, with potential displacement of current suburban residents (and a new of pressures on transportation and other infrastructure)?

“Achieving the sustainable future we want will require attention to these issues very soon.”

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This is the second parcel of data being released by Forterra about Puget Sound millennials.

The [first parcel](#) looked at how the progressive stronghold of Puget Sound is about to get even more that way, given the values espoused by young adults in the region, many of them new here. Find that information as well as video reflections by local millennials [here](#).

Coming within the next month: additional parcels of data about millennial views on transportation, the environment and recreation.

A METHODOLOGICAL NOTE: We surveyed millennials in two ways: via phone and via the web.

- The phone millennials are a scientific sample. Based on the demographic data they supplied, we know that these millennials were mostly born in the local area; are more likely to be living with their parents (compared to their peers across the country); and/or are more likely to own a home.
- The web millennials are a convenience sample, taking part on an opt-in basis. These millennials are mostly newcomers from another state, are more likely to be living with their significant others (compared to their peers across the country), and are also overwhelmingly more likely to be renters.

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