

Public Participation Plan for Development Areas and Master Planning Efforts for all Boards Committee and commission for the City of Allegan

The City Council continues to seek through the community, committees and boards opportunities to engage a diverse set of stakeholders in planning development areas as it is incorporated in the master plan and other plans and reports. The goals of the process are to seek the following in order to maximize community involvement.

- Solicit public participation in each phase of the process
- Seek broad identification and representative involvement of all residents of the community
- Utilize effective and equitable avenues for distributing information and receiving comments
- Provide educational materials and design participation initiatives that will support and encourage effective participation
- Maintain and develop staff expertise in all aspects of participation
- Support and encourage continuous improvement in the methods used to meet the public need for information and involvement
- Record results of public engagement and recount these results back to the public.
- State Regulations on Public Participation

Once development areas and the five year master plan is identified for study, the Council shall require a public participation plan to complete the study which shall incorporate as many of the methods listed as following:

Basic Announcement Methods for Public Meetings- The following methods are often used to advertise public meetings. Many times, this does not result in involvement of all stakeholders, especially those with visual impairments, non-English speakers, the illiterate, youth, citizens with limited mobility and those who work during the time of the public meeting.

- Newspaper posting
- Website posting
- Flier posting on community hall door
- Announcements at council meeting
- Post card mailings
- Attachments to water bills
- Local cable notification

Proactive Practices- The following are some example public participation methods that are less reactive and more focused on education and collaborative visioning. Many of these methods would not be possible without strong partnerships with stakeholders identified earlier in the P³ and a community that is committed to public input.

- Surveys-Surveys are useful for identifying specific areas of interest or concentration from a broad scope of ideas or issues. These areas of interest can then be further explored using other methods like the ones outlined below. A community may use a survey to identify where to start in the planning process, or the general climate surrounding a topic. Surveys can be useful to get a general idea of something, but should not be used as the sole method of public input. It is helpful for a municipality to administer surveys with partners. For example, schools can send surveys home with children, churches can have them available to fill out and neighborhood groups can put them in mail boxes. As with most public input efforts, it is best to vary the delivery method (mailed, handed out, electronic) and include bilingual language if applicable in your community.

Community workshops- These could be as simple as a series of question and answer sessions or as creative as creating a board game. The P³ should identify potential venues, considering access for the disabled and citizens without vehicles. In addition, the P³ should identify how to reach underrepresented groups. For example, holding workshops in different languages to suit your community's demographic and at different locations and times. This section is an ideal place to identify who would facilitate the workshops; whether it is an outside consultant, active citizen or municipal staff. Often workshops are a great way to educate the community surrounding a specific topic and hear concerns, questions and ideas.

Charrettes- The charrette differs from a workshop because it is a multi-day event where designers and planners work on a plan in-between what are called "feedback loops". Usually between three and seven days, citizens can come to the "charrette studio", which is an office on or near the location of the proposed plan or project. Citizens offer ideas while the charrette team facilitates and observes. From these suggestions, the designers and planners change the plan to suit community input and present their creation the next day where the community offers feedback again. This makes up one cycle of a "feedback loop". There can be up to five feedback loops, resulting in a final plan shortly thereafter. This process can be completed with many different budgets, depending on the expertise of municipal staff and local residents. Charrettes take much planning beforehand. The P³ offers an opportunity to begin planning for how a community would hold a charrette and who would be involved. For more information, visit <http://www.charretteinstitute.org>.

- Walkabouts- Walkabouts offer candid feedback from a variety of stakeholders when discussing a specific area. They can be paired with community workshops or charrettes to measure the perceived safety and comfort of pedestrians in a downtown, neighborhood or corridor. Walkabouts are also useful for identifying desired design, problem properties or safety concerns. The P³ should identify how citizens will be notified of a walkabout, keeping in mind the limitations of just one notification method. In addition, the P³ should determine if community partners and staff can facilitate the sessions, or if a consultant will be necessary.

*One-on-one interviews- Interviews are a great way to get specifics on a topic. In the stakeholder section of the P³, specific community leaders may have been identified, making them ideal candidates for an interview. Some communities have individuals that are very vocal about issues in the community. Interviewing them may give some perspective on how to address their concerns. It is

important to remember that one interview reflects the opinion of one individual and should not be considered the standing of the entire community.

- Focus groups- Like interviews, focus groups can help to narrow down concepts or get a specific side of the story. Stakeholders groups identified earlier in P³ make ideal participants of a focus group.
- Standing committees- These are focus groups that repeatedly meet and will differ depending on the needs of a community. They are perfect for concerned residents, underrepresented groups, or groups that may have specific needs in a community, such as students or seniors. This is an opportunity for a municipality to draw from the expertise of residents, perhaps organizing a standing committee of real estate professionals, business owners and brokers to offer feedback.
- Social networking- Technology offers a unique opportunity to give and receive information to a mass of people. Municipalities can post events, share information and even solicit feedback. This public participation method is best used in conjunction with other methods because it excludes those who do not use social media. The P³ should identify the social media venues a community will use, the target audience of these venues and who will be responsible for making posts and monitoring the posts of others. The ability to spread misinformation or post disrespectful comments makes it important to plan for the use of social media.

Communicating and Evaluating Results

After the plan has been developed, it is important to communicate and receive evaluations through a variety of methods for not only the content, but the public process. One or more of the following methods shall be employed to assure effectiveness:

Public Meetings- The results of the report and inquires on how effective the process was shall be conducted at a public meeting. These efforts will be recorded in the minutes of record.

Surveys-Surveys will be distributed to inform the community of the report, but to also solicit feedback on the content as well as the process.

Community Workshops – Additional Charrettes- If the report requires additional steps, the Council encourages more public input and charrettes. These efforts will be announced at a minimum at public meetings as well as through the community e-newsletter (Connector), Allegan news, and on the city website.

One-on-one interviews- Interview results will be sought for individual comfort

Referral to Committees – Because of the extensive citizen representation in the committee process developed by the City Council, and depending on the content of the report and feedback, the report may be referred back to a committee for follow-up and recommendation. Meeting minutes will be taken by person, posted online, and a copy shall be provided to the City Council.