



Public Participation Plan

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1. Purpose, Goals, and Objectives (Community Engagement Statement)

As the economy picks up and more development proposals are reviewed, the lack of a local newspaper is being keenly felt. City Council and staff recognize the need to communicate effectively and engage residents in the decision making process. The City of Ypsilanti strives to prioritize public participation in planning and development processes to meet the following goals:

- The participants in public participation activities reflect the diversity of the City of Ypsilanti. Seek broad identification and representative involvement of all residents of the community. The diverse characteristics and needs of residents require different communication and outreach techniques.
- All public participation activities are conducted in open manner with equal access for all interested persons.
- Those most affected by a proposed planning, land use, or development project are invited and able to share their views and knowledge with decision makers.
- Seek out public participation in each phase of the master planning process.
- Information shall be made available in a timely and accessible manner to enable citizens to be involved in important decisions at various stages of the process.
- The results of public participation activities are communicated to decision makers and the public in a timely and accessible manner.
- Effectively use all forms of communication for distributing information and receiving comments and feedback.
- Support and encourage continuous improvement in the methods used to meet the public need for information and involvement. Public information and involvement methods are continually evolving. The City is committed to seek new and innovative ways to engage and keep the public involved throughout the process.
- Facilitate community participation meetings as a condition of significant public support for development in the form of subsidies, tax abatements, below-market priced land, or other enhanced public resources.
- Grow the ways the City connects and interacts with stakeholders digitally through social media, the website, and Newsflash notification system.
- The City will seek to update this public participation plan every three years to include new best practices as the way we communicate evolves.
- Staff will track the success of each method and public engagement process using qualitative and quantitative metrics and provide that information to Council.

2. Legally required

Our most basic responsibility is to meet the legally required noticing for certain decisions up for consideration by City Council, Planning Commission, or Zoning Board of Appeals. A number of laws dictate specific requirements for noticing, including:

- Home Rule City Act (1909)
- City Charter
- City Code of Ordinances
- The Michigan Open Meetings Act (PA 267 of 1976)
- The Michigan Planning Enabling Act (PA 33 of 2008)
- Brownfield Redevelopment Financing Act (PA 381 of 1996)
- Downtown Development Authority Act (PA 197 of 1975)
- The Personal Property Exemption Act (PA 328 of 1998)
- The Corridor Improvement Act (PA 280 of 2005)
- The Land Division Act (PA 288 of 1967)
- The Local Historic Districts Act (PA 169 of 1970)
- Other relevant local and state legislation

Generally, per the City Charter, the zoning ordinance, and other local ordinances, we currently follow the following process.

Zoning (122-323, 122-361, 122-397, 122-705)

For zoning amendments or zoning issues that involve eleven or more properties, such as a text amendment or large rezoning:

- A notice is placed in the paper of record (*Washtenaw Legal News* as of 5/2019) 15 days prior to the first meeting at which the item is discussed.
- If the issue goes to Council, then a notice is placed in the paper of record 10 days prior to the first Council meeting at which the item is discussed.
- If the item is an ordinance (rezonings, text amendments, PUDs), if it has been adopted by Council, a notice is placed on the City website and in the newspaper of record announcing its adoption.

For zoning amendments or other zoning issues that involve one to ten properties, such as a variance, special use permit, or small rezoning:

- Those who own or reside in property within 300' of the involved property are sent a mailed notice at least 15 days prior to the first meeting at which the item is discussed, a notice is placed in the paper of record, notices are mailed to utilities, newspapers, and other registered agencies; and notices are placed in the City Hall mailboxes of Councilmembers and Department Heads.
- If the zoning issue goes to Council, then the same process is followed prior to the first Council meeting at which the item is discussed.
- If the item is an ordinance (rezonings, text amendments, PUDs), if it has been adopted by Council, a notice is placed on the website and in the newspaper of record announcing its adoption.

Alley and Street closures or vacations (94-272, 94-352)

- Those who own or reside in property within 300' of the street or alley are mailed a notice at least 15 days prior to the first meeting at which the item is discussed, a notice is placed in the paper of record, notices are mailed to utilities, newspapers, and other registered agencies; and notices are placed in the City Hall mailboxes of Councilmembers and Department Heads.
- When the issue goes to Council, it is noticed as an ordinance; a notice is placed in the newspaper of record, and mailed to utilities, newspapers, and other registered agencies; and notices are placed in the City Hall mailboxes of Councilmembers and Department Heads.

For Master Plan, Parks Plan, and other plans, there are generally several Council public hearings, several Planning Commission &/or Parks & Recreation Commission public hearings, and many public input sessions and stakeholder sessions, all of which may be advertised in many different ways. At a legal minimum, a notice is placed in the newspaper of record and sent to neighboring jurisdictions. Practice has been more extensive, including public input sessions advertised in many different ways, stakeholder sessions, public surveys, social media posts, and press releases/media coverage.

3. Methods of communication

The City of Ypsilanti utilizes both tangible and digital methods of communication in order to effectively engage the public in the planning and development process. These methods consider staff capacity, cost, and scope when deciding which methods are best for which notifications.

Tangible Communication

- **Newspaper Notice:** Only those notices legally requiring publication are published. Staff strongly recommends switching to *Ann Arbor News* which is more widely available and known to the public than the current *Washtenaw Legal News*, however, this costs significantly more. This may take place at the Council organizational meeting immediately after elections. The City will seek to utilize local news outlets such as the Eastern Echo or WCC to reach people concerning special notices.
- **Mailbox notice:** The same notices that are mailed are placed in staff & CM mailboxes.
- **Mailing – chairs:** Related commission chairs are mailed a copy of a required public notice.
- **Mailing – letter:** These mailings are legally prescribed, sent in envelopes via first-class mail. Prior to 2018, these were sent trifolded, which caused issues with delivery. Mid 2018, staff shifted to envelopes, which appears to have a higher delivery rate. These are sent when public input is legally able to be directly considered, such as special uses, Planned Unit Developments, rezonings, etc.
- **Mailing – postcards:** For non-legally-required development proposals, such as a site plan reviewed by PC, or a site plan for new construction after approval by staff. This would be a notification, not so much an invitation; approvals are per the ordinance and public comment generally cannot be considered. *(proposed)*
- **Site Signage:** Required for applications reviewed by Planning Commission or Zoning Board of Appeals or HDC when public hearing is required. Staff will provide signage template to be placed by applicant. Required for Applications reviewed by Council with PC recommendation. Required for commercial incentive applications to Council. *(proposed)*
- **Neighborhood meeting:** Required for non-multifamily commercial special use and rezoning applications, applications reviewed by Council with PC recommendation, and commercial incentive applications to Council. These applicants are required to hold a neighborhood meeting and provide 300’ notices, CMs, etc; provided by staff prior to the public hearing. *(proposed)*
- **Public School System Mailers-** City staff will offer the public school system both digital and paper notices for distribution electronically and by mail wherever possible for special notifications. *(proposed)*

Digital Communication

The City of Ypsilanti increasingly relies upon digital platforms to communicate with stakeholders. Considerable staff time goes into stakeholder analysis identifying those impacted, affected, and interested, including traditionally underrepresented groups. Our digital presence is one of the few ways to truly engage in conversations with the public beyond route noticing and emphasis should be placed in its special noticing value.

- **Website newsflash:** When a newsflash is posted, an email/text is also sent to subscribers to that “interest” (newsflashes, planning, etc). We wish to grow this outreach through a “Keep up with Ypsi Notices” flyer that can be distributed in public places or events and digitally through our social media channels. This Newsflash is a key component of providing current and relevant notices without saturating our digital medium channels.
- **Agenda posting:** Subscribers to the website newsflash receive an email/text when an agenda is posted if they indicate an interest in that area.
- **Emailing Commission members:** Staff currently emails commission members regarding meeting cancellations. Staff will also email about applications received.
- **Facebook (Ypsi.Michigan):** When a newsflash is posted, a post is created on Facebook with a link back to the website. Growth in our following through targeted cross promotion, social media campaigns, and boosted posts could help us connect with additional stakeholders in a cost effective way. This digital medium is particularly useful in special noticing to engage stakeholders in the planning process. Often these digital mediums are the best way to connect people to real world events such as community workshops, charrettes, walking tours, and town hall meetings.
- **Nextdoor:** Staff will duplicate the Facebook posting to Nextdoor, a social media platform specifically geared for neighborhood communities. This could help us focus our target audience messaging and reach additional residents digitally. Over 1700 residents currently participate in Next Door. *(proposed)*
- **Youtube:** Staff will create a YouTube channel for special notices to ensure that all affected groups are informed about as well as invited and able to participate. Examples include a master planning process, proposed zoning changes beyond an individual property rezoning, town halls for major planning decisions such as parking strategy or Amtrak Train developments, and large-scale private development projects. *(proposed)*

- **Twitter:** Staff could manage a Twitter presence for time sensitive alerts like road closures, special meeting notices, office closures, meeting cancellations, and other routine communications. Linking our digital platforms such as Facebook, Nextdoor, Youtube, and Twitter would help us grow our social media following. *(proposed)*

4. Types of Communication

Opportunities for Public Participation

The Planning and Development Department separates public participation opportunities into two categories: routine and special. Routine processes occur on a weekly, monthly or annual basis as part of the standard business of official meetings and development reviews, but have a limited impact. Special processes occur at infrequent intervals and have the potential to impact a substantial portion of the community or the City as a whole.

Routine Public Participation Opportunities

Routine public participation opportunities include all meetings of the Planning Commission, Zoning Board of Appeals, and Historic District Commission, as well as any City Council meeting where a development review is on the agenda.

The Community Development Department tracks and shares public input for these instances with the elected or appointed body deciding the matter. If the deciding body requests additional public input, the Community Development Department will gather input and use special noticing methods for focus group meetings, walking tours in the neighborhood affected, or town hall meetings.

Development reviews requiring notice by state law- rezonings, special land uses, and variances – are included in this category. Annual required activities for the Planning Commission, Zoning Board of Appeals and Historic District Commission, such as the Planning Commissions yearly work plan, are routine public participation opportunities.

Routine noticing may also take place when there is a change in scheduling, such as when a meeting of a board or commission or City Council is cancelled, rescheduled, or a special meeting is called. In some cases, such as a site plan application, this is a true notification, not a call for engagement, due to the legal requirements inherent. In others, such as right-of-way requests, variance requests, planned unit developments, and special uses, the public is invited to give feedback and provide information on the expected effects of the specific proposal. Routine noticing may take place when:

- A variance is requested
- A site plan is submitted (for new construction, expansion, or change of use)
- A Special Use is proposed
- A right-of-way is requested to be closed or vacated
- A zoning ordinance change is requested
- A tax incentive is applied for
- A new liquor license is applied for
- Applications reviewed by PC, discretionary (special use permit, nonconformities)
- Applications reviewed by ZBA (variances, appeals)
- Applications reviewed by HDC when public hearing required (demolition)
- Applications reviewed by Council with PC recommendations (PUD, rezonings, ROW closures/vacations)
- Commercial incentive applications to Council (redevelopment liquor license, OPRA, IFT, PILOT, BF)
- Applications reviewed by PC, non-discretionary (site plans)
- Packet postings
- Special meetings
- Meeting cancellations

Reactive Public Notification and/or Participation Methods

Currently do	Change to existing proposed	New proposal

	Physical								Digital					
	Newspaper Notice	Mailbox notice (department heads, Council)	Mailing – 300'	Mailing – related committee chairs	Mailing – 300' (postcard)	Site Signage (placed by applicant)	Posting of agenda in City Hall entryway	Neighborhood meeting	Website newsflash (with email push)	Facebook	Nextdoor	Emailing - related commission	Youtube	Twitter
Applications reviewed by PC, non-discretionary														
Packet postings														
Special meetings														
Meeting cancellations														
Applications reviewed by PC, discretionary														
Applications reviewed by ZBA														
Applications reviewed by HDC when public hearing required														
Applications reviewed by Council with PC recommendation														
Commercial incentive applications to Council														

Special Process Public Participation Opportunities

Projects with the potential to impact a substantial part or the entire City will have a tailored public participation policy to ensure that all affected groups are informed and invited to participate. Examples include the master plan or its update; a sub-plan, such as the parks and recreation or non-motorized transportation plan; council goal setting; capital improvements plan; and large-scale development projects.

This can also be done during the development of specific policies, such as those for liquor license applications, tax incentive applications, and revocations, property disposition policies, or any other policy intended to guide decisions in many instances and for several years. As these policy proposals and changes can affect the community very broadly and significantly, this type of notification- and engagement- is rare, but should be extensive.

Each special public participation effort will have the following:

- Stakeholder analysis identifying those impacted, affected, and interested, including traditionally underrepresented groups.
- Selection of the best techniques to meet our promise to the public for each stakeholder group.
- A variety of locations and times for meetings where stakeholder groups are comfortable and able to attend. Times and locations may vary for each stakeholder group.
- Both traditional, expected “public meeting”-style engagement opportunities and more accessible off-site, asynchronous opportunities, such as surveys or installations.

Special public participation opportunities should engage stakeholders in order to convey the following information:

- Clear understanding of the scope
- Full range of objective information about the topic
- Clear understanding of the criteria by which Council will evaluate the topic
- Balanced alternatives that include stakeholder issues and concerns
- Clear comparison of alternatives

And further, the City should ensure that:

- Everyone in the community is invited and able to participate in an accessible, meaningful way.
- The participants in public participation activities reflect the diversity of the City of Ypsilanti. This requires monitoring of the process, and in the event that a group is under-represented their input is specifically sought out.
- All public participation activities are conducted in an open manner, with equal access for all interested persons. This includes scheduling locations and times for meetings where stakeholder groups are comfortable and able to attend. Times and locations may vary for each stakeholder group. For instance, if traditional “9 to 5” workers are under-represented, an effort may be made to schedule meetings on the weekends or after 5pm; if households with children are under-represented, then meetings with childcare may be offered.
- Those most affected are invited and able to share their views and knowledge with decision-makers. In the case of a topical sub-plan, such as the non-motorized plan, people who use bicycles, walk, or use mobility assistive devices should be specifically involved.
- Information shall be made available in a timely and accessible manner, to enable citizens to be involved in important decisions at various stages of the process.
- Time and resources must be dedicated to maintain and improve vehicles of communication, such as electronic communications, social media, mailed notices and invitations, traditional media outreach and involvement, and in-person attendance at neighborhood meetings. Community engagement takes a significant amount of time and effort, both by the community and by those who perform the outreach.

As a follow-up to the process, the City should also be transparent with who made the policy decision, why the decision was made, and how stakeholder issues were considered. The specific methods of engagement can, and should, be made on a case-by-case basis depending upon the policy change being sought.

5. Community Benefits Ordinance Participation Procedure

A Community Benefits Agreement is required between the City of Ypsilanti and a developer prior to Ypsilanti City Council’s final approval of Public Support. City Council may grant preliminary approval of public support subject to the execution of a Community Benefits Agreement. Public support means a financial incentive of \$50,000 or more or the sale or lease of City or publicly-owned land

for a price of at least \$10,000 below market value, as determined by the City Assessor. Section. 30-527 of the Community Benefits Ordinance lays out the following procedure required for the development of Community Benefits Agreements for all Projects:

- The Department shall coordinate with the developer and interested Councilmembers to call and hold a community participation meeting, which shall be chaired by an interested Councilmember. The purpose of this meeting shall be to inform the community about the project and to allow the community to discuss potential community benefits. Particularly, the scope of the request for public support, the information discussed in Section 30-526 of this Division, and the provisions and procedures of this Article shall be shared with the Community.
- There shall be time at this meeting for those present to ask questions, discuss and identify among themselves potential community benefits, and recommend resident members for the ad-hoc committee discussed in Section 30-527(B) of this Division. Applications for appointment shall be made available for resident members of the ad-hoc committee discussed in Section 30-527(B) of this Division.
- The developer shall be present at this meeting to present information and answer questions. Notice of this meeting shall be provided as required by this Division no less than 30 days in advance. This meeting shall be subject to the Open Meetings Act and its records subject to the Freedom of Information Act. If this meeting is held on a weekday, it shall not begin prior to 6 p.m.

After the committee described in Section 30-527(B) of this Division is established, it shall meet at least twice within 60 days. The purpose of these meetings is to identify community benefits mutually agreed upon with the developer and make a recommendation to City Council. Within these 60 days, the committee shall provide a recommended Community Benefits Agreement for consideration by City Council. The developer may produce and deliver a response for consideration by City Council within 15 days of the issuance of the recommendation.

Upon the request of the committee or the developer, respectively, City Council may grant an extension to the deadlines described herein. The City Manager, in his or her sole discretion, may direct employees and departments of the City to review and report to the committee concerning specific aspects of a proposed Community Benefits Agreement. Likewise, the City Manager, in his or her sole discretion, may direct employees and departments of the City to review a recommended Community Benefits Agreement issued by the committee and report to City Council. Notice for meetings of the committee shall be provided as required by this Division no less than seven days in advance.

Sec. 30-528. After the procedures discussed in this Division, City Council shall hold a public hearing regarding the proposed Community Benefits Agreement no less than 15 days prior to its consideration by City Council.

Sec. 30-529. Notice of all meetings discussed in this Division shall be published according to Section 11.13 of the City Charter. In addition, such notice shall be sent by mail or personal delivery to all Registered Groups; the Developer; to all persons to whom real property is assessed within 300 feet of the property boundary of where the Project is located; and to the occupants of all structures within 300 feet of where the Project is located. If the name of an occupant is not known, the term "occupant" may be used in making notification. Notification need not be given to more than one occupant of a structure, except that if a structure contains more than one dwelling unit or spatial area owned or leased by different individuals, partnerships, businesses, or organizations, one occupant of each unit or special area shall receive notice. Such notice shall include the following:

- Description of the nature of the meeting. This description shall include a brief summary of the project and the public support requested, the relevant requirements and procedures of this Article, and the purpose for which the particular meeting is being held.
- A legal description or address of the property which the project is located.
- Statement of when and where the meeting will be held.
- Statement of when and where comments will be received.

6. Conclusion

The City of Ypsilanti is committed to the regular assessment of how well we identify stakeholders and engage them, not only during the master planning process, but on a continual basis. A public participation strategy is essential to formalize those efforts and outline how the public will be engaged throughout planning and development processes. Public participation is the process by which a community consults with interested or affected stakeholders before making a decision. It is two-way communication and collaborative problem solving with the objective of being intentionally inclusive, and the goal of achieving better and more acceptable decisions. Public participation aims to prevent or minimize disputes by creating a process for resolving issues before they become an obstacle. The best plans and proposals have the support of many stakeholders from businesses, residents, community groups and elected and appointed community officials. Public engagement should be more frequent and interactive than only soliciting input during the master plan update and public hearings.

