



Department of Planning & Community & Economic Development

Planning Division

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To: Common Council

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From: Southeast and Southwest Area Plan Project Managers (Rebecca Cnare, Jeff Greger, Kirstie Laatsch, and Urvashi Martin)

Re: Summary of recommendations to improve public participation for Area Plans

Date: September 10, 2024

This memo summarizes recommendations to improve public participation related to Area Planning. Human Resources – Organizational Development collaborated with the Planning Division to gather input from City staff on how to improve the [Area Plan](#) process. Nineteen staff representing nine City’s agencies participated at some level in the Area Plan process evaluation. In addition to the evaluation session facilitated by Human Resources, Planning Division staff generated additional ideas related to things that worked well or could be improved.

The following is a summary of the evaluation related to Area Plan public participation, organized by ten topic areas.

1. Public meetings

- a. Replicate the **multi-agency open houses** in which many City agencies attended, shared related initiatives, and received feedback. The events were well-attended and seemed successful.
- b. Northeast Area Plan Connect Events held at Sycamore and Reindahl Park were fun, informal, and useful in terms of public feedback. **Talking one-on-one** with community members seemed appreciated.
- c. **Continue to reduce the formality** of public meetings as much as possible.

2. Boards, Commissions, Committees (BCC)

- a. **BCC check-ins along the way** were important. One additional check-in with the Transportation Commission after round 1 of public engagement may have been beneficial.
- b. Line up **Plan Commission check-ins** with one of their quarterly special meetings.

3. Messaging

- a. Make improvements related to **explaining what an Area Plan does and does not do** early in and throughout the process
- b. Continue to improve framing the plan in ways that are **relevant to stakeholders, especially underrepresented groups**.
- c. Continue to improve the way we **explain the topic of population growth, change, and the role of planning** in guiding change, growth, and preservation.

- d. **Frame the topic of updating the Generalized Future Land Use (GFLU) Map with clearer expectations** up front regarding the need for additional housing throughout the City, including additional housing in each of the Area Plan geographies, and how that gets reflected in the GFLU Map.
- e. Work more proactively with the Department's Public Information Officer and **media to address misinformation.**

4. Businesses

- a. There were **low response rates to business surveys**. Consider methods for improvement.
- b. See also 5c.

5. Alders

- a. Ask Alders to participate in engagement activities as much as their schedules allow.
- b. Ask Alders to **get community leaders engaged** so that folks have someone they know and trust at public meetings.
- c. Ask **Alders to support business outreach** in their district.

6. Informational materials

- a. **Continue creating FAQ materials** and add to them throughout the Area Plan process.
- b. Continue to emphasize **plain language** for materials.
- c. Improve the way background info maps can be viewed. Consider a **"map gallery."**
- d. Adding a paragraph of context to help **explain the background info maps** was helpful.
- e. Add clearer directions on how to use the **Konveio online commenting tool**.
- f. **Create materials to summarize the City's land use policies** and priorities from other major citywide initiatives, such as Complete Green Streets.
- g. Publish the [Neighborhood Indicators Project](#) data for all 12 Area Plan geographies.

7. Community Partners

- a. Community Partners were **successful at informing the community about the plans and upcoming events**.
- b. Due to many factors, including the complexity of Area Plan topics, Community Partners were **less successful at collecting feedback** from stakeholders.
- c. Consider directly reaching out to organizations active in the area to offer a **stipend in exchange for publicity assistance**, instead of or in addition to MOUs with Community Partners.

8. External partners (such as schools, neighborhood centers, etc.)

- a. Coordinating with Vel Phillips **Memorial High School and Lussier Community Education Center worked well to reach teens** and hear meaningful feedback that informed plan recommendations. It was also important for reaching **underrepresented groups**. Future Area Plans should include similar youth engagement.
- b. Meeting with **school principals** prior to developing draft recommendations was helpful. Other relevant school partners include Community School Coordinators and social workers.
- c. **Reach out to school districts** (not just individual schools) earlier in the process to discuss school capacity.
- d. It is **challenging to reach renters** for many reasons. Reaching renters through property managers can be difficult. Many neighborhood association boundaries focus on single-family

areas or do not include apartments.

- e. Continue to collaborate with **Neighborhood Resource Teams** to reach renters, Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) communities, and other typically underrepresented groups.

9. Summarizing public feedback

- a. Make **public participation demographic data**, and comparison to area demographics, available and updated throughout the process.
- b. **Separate feedback by source** to highlight feedback from typically underrepresented groups.

10. Miscellaneous

- a. Continue working with **Community Connectors** in the Department of Civil Rights to reach residents from the **Hmong, Latinx, and Chinese communities**.
- b. Consider incorporating **live music** at public events.
- c. Create **Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) documentation for Area Plan public participation process**. The [HR Toolkit](#) has a SOP template that Planning could use in collaboration with DCR and HR as needed.