

Process Design workgroup Public Involvement Task Force

For December 17, 2003 meeting

DRAFT outline of working group priorities

Summary

This working group acknowledges that there is a significant difference between public information and public involvement. Some recommended action steps relate specifically to public information. This is because the process of involving the public in a productive manner is reliant on accurate and timely information. Some problems identified for this working group will need solutions that improve information flow in order to allow for involvement at key points pertinent to the public.

The major realization of this working group was that addressing the process issues raised in the information gathering stage of this process – early notification, prioritization of need for involvement, ongoing information flow, finding a consistent planning process to fit Portland's system, and developing effective evaluation techniques – require and deserve more time. Processes are by nature both fluid and dynamic. Developing common design principles and practices that allow for necessary flexibility will be a large project in and of itself.

The working group has gathered a large amount of information and conceptualized, with the assistance of public involvement staff, the foundation for a workable model. However, the key finding of this working group is that there is more work to be done before a truly effective product will be produced and that the work of this group should be continued past the life of this Task Force. It is recommended that a Continuing Public Involvement Working Group composed of community leaders and city public involvement staff be tasked with completing the work recommended by this Task Force Working Group on Process Design.

It is also recommended that city public involvement staff take an active role in developing the process design model and garnering support for it. To change these processes will necessitate a change in culture, both within the city and within the neighborhoods and community, and internal change will only be successful with the support of knowledgeable staff and City managers.

This working group offers the following action steps as a pathway toward solving some complex problems with Portland's public involvement processes. The group endeavored to offer some actions that could be undertaken immediately as well. These are noted.

Section 1: Process by which to direct a project into a public involvement or public information process.

Problem 1: Citizens don't feel they have early information or involvement to provide input and help make decisions about project prioritization, funding, and levels of public involvement in implementation.

Action steps:

- Develop a mechanism by which to provide early notification and public input into Bureau discussions about major CIP proposals and upcoming budget recommendations to the City Council before Bureaus submit their requested budgets to the Mayor and Council. (*Lead: PI Staff for budget outreach and CIP Outreach Support Group, both currently working on this*)
- Continue to refine and implement the biennial budget outreach process – Your City, Your Choice – which includes community forums with bureau directors and Council prior to development of the Proposed Budget. (*Lead: PI Staff for budget outreach with Study Group*)

Problem 2: There is no process to determine which projects, policies, and decisions need public involvement and/or public information or what type of involvement at what stage is appropriate to different projects.

Action steps:

- Develop a matrix to guide determination of types and timing of involvement/information (e.g., staff proposal, Warringah matrix, etc.). Incorporate use of the matrix to determine when and how to direct significant public policies, public works, and other government actions into a public involvement or public information process. (*Lead: Public Involvement Staff Networking Group in coordination with Continuing PI Working Group*)
- Include a project conceptualization stage for large capital projects prior to development (e.g., engineering, design) to explore possible public involvement issues and needs. (*Lead: Continuing PI Working Group*)

Problem 3: Some projects that had early involvement during a planning or project development phase come up for action once funding becomes available, which may be several years later. In these cases citizens may feel they are brought into the process too late. The affected neighbors may not be the original ones who were involved, leading to the perception that there is late notice or involvement. The underlying cause of the problem may be a lack of continuous information flow that keeps citizens informed throughout a lengthy process.

Another potential cause of the problem may be lack of public involvement through the project development phase.

Action steps:

- Review models for continuous information flow, involvement, and access to government (e.g., bureau advisory committees, neighborhood needs, neighborhood service teams, community assessments, etc.) to determine best approach for Portland and implement improvements. (*Lead: Continuing PI Working Group*)
- Provide list of upcoming CIP projects in PortlandOnline at the beginning of each fiscal year. Link to PortlandMaps.com for information about project timelines and contact information. (*Lead: CIP Outreach Support Group – work is in progress; full implementation by early Fall 2004*)

Problem 4: Lack of process and funding for communities to identify their own local spending priorities that are not included in the city budget, especially processes that support the capacity of the community to get involved and identify needs.

Action steps:

- Explore models/options and determine a mechanism for providing community funding (e.g., community grants, public or neighborhood budget, etc.) and dedicate funds for community-identified needs. (*Lead: ONI*)

Section 2: Process by which a bureau would design a public involvement process.

Problem 1: City bureau public involvement processes can be inconsistent. This creates confusion for the public and lack of support for bureaus when citizens question the process. Bureaus and the public do not have a basic framework for developing, implementing, and evaluating public involvement processes to encourage consistency and reliability. Also a lack of connection between project design and public involvement process design exists.

Action Steps:

- Require that all bureaus develop written public involvement policies that are consistent with Council adopted citywide public involvement principles. (Lead: ONI & City Council)
- Direct bureaus to develop written public involvement plans – consistent with Council adopted principles of public involvement and in the format of a common template – for all major policy, planning, and capital improvement projects. Publish these on the Internet. (Lead: City Council)
- Develop, adopt, and provide staff and community training on a “Best Public Involvement Practices Handbook” with a common template, checklist, and questions for developing public involvement plans. The Handbook should incorporate existing successful practices of city bureaus and it should be **based primarily on Metro’s model and the city public involvement staff proposal developed during the Task Force process.** (research and development has been completed.) The recommended model is as follows.
 - **Process step One:** Identify types of activities that require public involvement (matrix from above)
 - **Process step Two:** Determine extent and timing of the public involvement process
 - Priority level of project (use matrix)
 - Project duration
 - Goals of involvement
 - Level of impact
 - Stakeholder analysis
 - **Process step Three:** Develop a Project Public Involvement Plan that includes contingencies for reevaluating and revising the plan during implementation (Use Metro’s model)
 - Project Public Involvement Plan elements
 - Notification
 - Methodology

- Communications
- Logistics
- Public review and comment
- Use of public input
- Evaluation
- Project Public Involvement Plan Form (Metro's)
- Project Public Involvement Plan Checklist (Metro's)

- **Process step Four:** Account for Implementation and Evaluation
 - Evaluation report
 - Feedback loop

(Lead: Continuing PI Working Group)

ACCOMPAINING MATERIALS (proposed):

Staff process proposal
Metro Public Involvement planning document
Excerpt from Warringah materials: sample matrix
Appendix of ideas from working group

Section 3: Process by which a bureau would implement the public involvement process.

Implementation

Problem: Public lack of knowledge and understanding of involvement processes. This information gap can lead to lack of trust in the processes themselves.

Issue: Information about public involvement efforts is not consistently transparent or available to the public.

Action Steps:

- Post the following documents on the web: *(Assign to ONI and bureaus)*
 - Council adopted public involvement principles.
 - When completed, Council-adopted Public Involvement Best Practices Handbook and accompanying forms.
 - Types and timing matrix (from above.)
 - Bureau public involvement policies, in particular:
 - └ Major policy and capital improvement project Public Involvement Plans.
- Determine best approach for ensuring bureaus follow required, adopted steps when planning public involvement and/or information processes. *(Assign to continuation group)*

Minimum Notice before Final Action

Problem: There is a need to determine the minimum period of time for public notice before final action is taken by a bureau or City Council on major policy or capital improvement projects as well as other types of projects.

Issue: Current City Code and State law provide some guidance on this issue, but there remains a perception that notice is not adequate for the public to prepare comments and for established groups to notify their memberships. There is still lack of agreement between current Code requirements of a minimum 30 days advance notice to Neighborhood Associations before final action is taken and the request of citizens on the ONI Guidelines, Review, Empowerment, and Assessment Team for a 45 day period. It was agreed upon earlier this summer the PI Task Force would tackle this issue.

Action Steps:

- Determine a compromise on this issue as part of the Best Practices Handbook development process. There are possibly different notice periods that would be appropriate for different projects. It may be that a lack on ongoing information exacerbates this issue.

Also, the number of days notice may not be the key criteria affecting public perception. The underlying causes need to be explored to address this issue fully. Key to exploring the underlying causes will be looking at hard data on current notice periods. To date, only anecdotal data exists stating that the city as a whole doesn't follow Code requirements and doesn't provide adequate notice. There may be a difference between the perceived lack of notice and the actual amount of notice given. If notice standards are not being met, the solution will be different than if, in fact, notice is usually provided 30, 45 or more days in advance.

The working group also found that what is sometimes perceived as lack of notice is really distrust of the intent of the involvement process. If the community perceives that there is no true intent to utilize or respond to its input, then it often concludes that the problem is notice too late in the process to influence the outcome. The solution in that case *may* be earlier involvement, but earlier notification wouldn't resolve the issue if there is really little or no influence the community can bring to bear to change the outcome.

In other words, the working group found that it's important to clarify and provide full disclosure of the community's role in and degree of influence on a given project (e.g., when the city solicits input on the entire project but really can only modify a small component of the project, the role of the community is not clearly communicated.) These sample solutions address different problems and causes. The working group feels that a true process improvement strategy needs to be applied to this issue.
(Assign to continuation group)