

# **Public Involvement Principles Workgroup**

## **Public Involvement Task Force**

For December 17, 2003 mtg.

- *No changes recorded in this document from October 22, 2003 meeting.*
- *Key issues raised at October meeting include need for principles related to role and responsibility of citizen participants in public involvement efforts, neighborhood associations, coalitions, and other diverse constituencies. Recognized need to organize dialogue between Task Force members and ONI GREAT members on this issue. Will need to take place in winter.*

## **PURPOSE STATEMENT**

Good quality public involvement is essential to effective, legitimate, and accountable governance in our city. Good governance in Portland can only be achieved through a collaborative and constructive partnership between city government and the community.

These principles set out a public involvement “bill of rights” and define what citizens should expect from city elected officials and city government staff. Portland’s elected city officials and city staff should follow the spirit and ethic laid out in these principles and engage the public in a true governance partnership to create, develop, implement, and evaluate legislative and administrative decisions and actions in our city. City elected officials and city staff must be accountable for the implementation of these principles.

Public involvement processes should communicate the interests and meets the process needs of all participants—in city government and in the community. True “public involvement” requires a very different mindset, approach, and skills than “public information.” Good quality process design and implementation is crucial to the success of any public involvement process.

## **Why is effective public involvement important?**

Effective public involvement is essential to good governance and the health of our city because:

- Effective public involvement leads to better decisions.
- Effective public involvement is essential to ensure the legitimacy of government action and public understanding of and support for public policies and programs.
- Effective public involvement increases government accountability by increasing public awareness and understanding of public policy challenges, options, decisions,

and results. Greater accountability also sheds light on government operations and reduces the likelihood of mistakes, poor decisions, and abuse of power.

Good quality public involvement leads to better decisions by ensuring that:

- decisions are based on objective and thorough analysis of all important factors
- community problems and needs are accurately and fully defined
- the broad range of public goals and priorities affected by proposed policies and projects is identified
- the full range of policy and project alternatives is identified
- the likely impacts on the community and opportunities to maximize benefits and minimize the negative impacts are better understood.

City commissioners and city bureaus are more successful in developing and implementing public policies and projects when they build public support for their proposals. Poor public involvement aggravates public cynicism and distrust of government and erodes community support for government action.

## **OUR PRINCIPLES OF GOOD PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

- 1. Governance as Partnership:** *City elected officials and staff must join with citizens to create a partnership in which the public has a real voice in setting the course of the community. Effective involvement of the public is essential to achieve and sustain this partnership.*

The public should have a say in government decisions that affect their lives. Elected officials and other city government decision makers bear a strong responsibility for guarding and nurturing this partnership, sharing power with the community, and recognizing and protecting diverse interests in the community. This partnership must extend to interactions and agreements that affect our community between the City of Portland and other government entities.

The following principles will help achieve this partnership:

### **CULTURE**

- 2. Culture of listening, hearing, and acting on public input:** *Public input must be integral to the development and implementation of public policies, public works projects, public services, and other city government actions.*

City government must be create a culture that is receptive to working with the community. Public participation includes the promise that the public's contribution will influence city government decisions. Elected officials and

city staff must listen, hear and act on public input. Public involvement must not simply be an opportunity for public comment, but must be used to identify and respond to the range of community goals and concerns during the creation, development, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and revision of public policies and actions.

- 3. Collaborative, consensus-seeking, community-based approach:** *City government/community partnerships should consistently pursue collaborative, consensus-seeking, community-based approaches between all stakeholders when identifying policy priorities, and when creating, developing or implementing public policies, public works projects, public services, and other city government actions.*

City government's use of this approach is essential to reaching the best decisions and for weighing and balancing diverse needs, hopes, and interests in the community. Stakeholders include city bureaus and officials and all implementing bodies as well as the "public"—which includes neighborhood and business associations, other community organizations, and individual citizens.

- 4. Ongoing Communication and Dialogue:** *City decision-makers and staff should establish clear, understandable, and ongoing communication and dialogue with the public and with formal groups in the community.*

Communication should be "early and often." City communications and processes should be understandable and encourage public involvement. City decision-makers and staff should consider and respond to citizen input and questions in a timely manner and respect all perspectives and insights. City decision makers and staff should communicate the rationale for decisions and provide feedback to the community on the results, outcomes, and impacts of public input.

- 5. Transparency of Governance and Processes:** *The public policy decision-making process should be accessible, open, honest, and understandable. Public participants should receive the information they need to participate effectively.*

Community members easily should be able to access information about upcoming and current city processes and projects, including the reasons for the process or project, the way public involvement principles and standards apply to different projects, the responsible staff (e.g. organization charts), timelines, work plans and schedules, and the decision-making process and key decision points.

The roles, rights, responsibilities and degree of accountability of city officials, bureau directors, staff, citizen leadership, organizations, and

community members for the creation, development, and implementation of city policies or programs should be clear to all.

Important information should not be hidden from the public. Important information—including information on the pros and cons and likely impacts of policies and actions should be honestly and objectively shared—no hidden agendas, no “spin”, no evasion of appropriate public process.

## COMMUNITY

- 6. Inclusiveness:** *“Community” in Portland is made up of a rich diversity of groups and interests. City elected officials and city bureaus staff should identify, reach out to, and involve the full range of community groups and interests in public dialogue and decision-making processes.*

Community in Portland includes both the formal neighborhood and business association structure as well as a wide variety of other groups, organizations, and interests. City elected officials and staff must ensure that groups and interests that are not well-represented within the formal neighborhood and business association structure also have a voice in the development and implementation of public policy, projects and services.

- 7. Diversity and Accessibility:** *Culturally appropriate and effective strategies and techniques should be used to reach out to and involve constituencies traditionally under-represented in the community—for example, people of color, immigrants and refugees, youth, people with low incomes, seniors, and people with disabilities.*

Better communication, coordination, and cooperation should be encouraged between neighborhood and business associations and other groups and interests in the community—these groups should not be played off each other. Groups should be allowed to identify their own representatives on city advisory committees—these should be individuals who the groups find effective and credible representatives.

- 8. The Neighborhood System:** *Portland’s nationally-recognized formal neighborhood and business association system is the cornerstone of public involvement and the primary channel for citizen input and involvement in our city.*

Formal neighborhood associations and related community business associations are valuable repositories of place-based memory in the community. Their members have useful insights into the dynamics of the needs and players in their area and their involvement brings needed legitimacy to public processes.

City government should enhance the capacity of this system by using and respecting the neighborhood system, by supporting the system with the financial, technical, and training support, and by supporting the activities of recognized neighborhood organizations when creating or implementing policies or programs.

## PROCESS

- 9. Early Involvement:** *The public should be involved early when a policy and project is being shaped—not after many important decisions have already been made and little realistic flexibility remains.*

The public should be integrally involved in planning, projects, and policy development, from concept through evaluation and revision. The public should be involved when most likely to be able to affect the outcome. This includes being involved in the setting policy priorities and especially in the formation of city budgets, which drives much of the daily agenda of city government.

- 10. Effective and Flexible Process Design and Implementation:** *Public involvement processes and techniques should be well-designed, appropriately fit the scope, character, and impact of the policy or project, and be able to adapt to changing needs and issues as a process moves forward.*

The public participation process should seek out and facilitate the involvement of those potentially affected—“nothing about me, without me.” Processes should be appropriate to the scope, impact, and cost of the proposed policies, projects, or actions.

Participants should be involved in designing the process and defining how they will participate. Processes should be designed to achieve meaningful results—the time and resources of either city government or the public should not be wasted on empty “show” processes likely to have little meaningful effect on government policies or actions.

Effective public involvement process implementation requires skilled facilitation and strong technical support. City staff and community members must be given adequate time and funding effectively to participate in and complete the process. Mid stream process reviews should indicate whether the processes need to be adjusted.

**11. Capacity within City Government:** *City elected officials, decision-makers, and staff must have the skills and will to support and achieve effective public involvement as set out in these principles.*

The city government must achieve and maintain a culture that understands, values, and implements effective public involvement. Adequate and ongoing public involvement education and training of city officials and city staff is needed to achieve and maintain this culture.

**12. Coordination and Consistency:** *City bureaus should coordinate their public outreach and involvement resources and activities to make the best use of city resources and public time and efforts.*

Similar coordination should be pursued with other governments and public agencies to achieve greater consistency in public involvement values. Public involvement principles and standards should be consistent across different governments and public agencies in Portland. The quality and basic principles that guide public involvement should not vary significantly from government to government or agency to agency in the Portland metropolitan region.

## **EVALUATION/ACCOUNTABILITY**

**13. Evaluation:** *Mechanisms must be in place to allow ongoing monitoring, evaluation, and reporting of how well city elected officials, decision-makers, and staff follow these principles when developing and implementing public policies, projects, and services, and the effectiveness of individual public involvement processes.*

Evaluation results should be used to identify problems and successes and to continuously improve public involvement processes and public policies.

**14. Accountability:** *City elected officials, decision-makers and staff must be accountable for following these governance and public involvement principles.*

Mechanisms must be in place to encourage implementation of these principles and to ensure effective corrective action when the principles are not followed.

City decision makers and staff should communicate the rationale for their decisions and provide feedback to process participants and the community on the impacts, outcomes, and results of public input.