

Citywide Public Involvement Standards Taskforce

Summary of random public comments

Below are comments on the taskforce's effort that have been submitted randomly between March and May 2003 from 25 sources that engaged probably over 100 people. This has included:

- Comments from forum at SE Uplift
- Comments from North Portland neighborhood association chairs discussion
- Individual citizen activists
- Neighborhood Association leaders
- City staff
- Organizations of color
- Public involvement consultants
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1. Create minimum citywide public involvement standards.

- An objective of this project is to develop "standards" that work for city agencies as well as citizens. This is a two-way-street.
- Adopt and publicize a program for citizen involvement that defines procedures by which the general public will be involved in the ongoing land-use planning process. (See State of Oregon land use Goal #1.)
- Have clear and known process for major projects, land use actions, siting of major facilities.
- Develop a project initiation template/checklist for City PI projects. Use them to specify the purpose of their public involvement project and outline who will be involved and what outreach tools will be used.
- Taskforce needs to focus on how do we strengthen and standardize the role of citizens to participate, not just to manage them.
- Purpose of standards should be how to ensure proper and consistent implementation that lives up to the principles adopted by Council.
- Purpose of standards should be ensuring implementation of Council adopted Principles and evaluating effectiveness of current practices.

2. Create a common definition of Public Involvement.

- PI means to me citizens participate in the overall process of making plans and decisions. It doesn't mean that a public involvement process in and of itself is to MAKE decisions. Decisions are most often made by others (i.e. City Council, PDC Board) who have been duly elected/empowered.
- Create standard definition of Public Involvement. Not all projects are PI even though public perceive them to be. Clarify if public involvement means the ability to MAKE the decision about a project. Public thinks if this does not happen they consider there was no process or it was denied.
- Suggestion: the purpose of this public involvement process is:
 - **Informational** - to provide the public with information about a project/program that is being implemented. Staff is not empowered to make changes to the program; nor are the citizens.

Citywide Public Involvement Standards Taskforce Summary of random public comments

- **Feedback** - to provide feedback to staff who are at some stage of developing a project/program and need to hear comments on draft plans; and understand issues, concerns and desires of the community. The final plan and 'decision' (made by _____) may or may not reflect feedback obtained from this process.
- **Advisory** - a "representative" task force/committee is being established for the specific purpose of
 - a. Developing specific recommendations on a particular issue or plan; or
 - b. Monitoring/evaluating implementation of a project/program.
- If the purpose of the public involvement process is clearly articulated in this fashion, then people can decide to participate without false "expectations." It would also serve (hopefully) to make it clear from the start that "we're not here to discuss, and we can't change the zoning code regarding housing density."

3. Improve transparency, access to information, how decisions made.

- Provide staff assistance to help citizens understand how to read and understand the City budget.
- Break down City budget by neighborhood boundaries so people know where resources spent.
- Provide enough background info about proposed changes for grassroots organizations to develop an understanding of how the changes might affect their community.

4. Improve City respect for public and City staff opinions, PI process.

- Be honest with community members about what the possibilities are.
- City Council needs to show commitment to public involvement.
- Do not use PI to provide political cover for decisions already made.
- Adversarial system: don't really want input, doesn't make difference.
- Participants fear of getting blind-sided, hidden agendas by City.
- Only feel "used" by the City's PI process – not heard.
- The public doesn't trust the government because the government has lost the trust of the people. The government needs to reach out and build real relationships that they honor and respect.
- Concern that bureaus are not listening to intelligent debate about key City projects. Attitude appears to be the City are the experts and citizens are uninformed and ought to let City staff do their work.
- Sometimes PI staff and managers are hesitant to allow citizens to assist with creating and implementing plans and what kind of an effect that hesitation had on citizen involvement.

Citywide Public Involvement Standards Taskforce Summary of random public comments

5. Utilize electronic technologies to improve citizen participation.

- Create intranet site for staff, a database, to help staff see what outreach efforts are underway so that they can better see how their project might connect to existing efforts. Provides peer support; staff could review and comment on the approaches that others are using.
- Do not become too reliant on email; do not abandon traditional methods of outreach that may be more effective.
- Create a single City interested stakeholder web-based database that all City bureaus utilize. Provide for multiple options to categorize interest for committees, mailing lists, bureau topics, etc.
- Create a central list management staff role, allows ability to measure performance and efficiency of updating lists, better accountability. (Savings by eliminating database licenses on individual computers, use central d-base computer.)
- Above measures save on postage and printing due to eliminating undeliverable mailings. W/O address correction City can't clean database.

6. Improve communication strategies for public involvement notifications.

- Adequately fund neighborhood newsletters and organize door-to-door outreach to improve diverse and fair representation at neighborhood mtgs.

7. Engage public at earliest point in planning processes.

- Start engaging the public/neighborhood associations at the very beginning of projects.
- Early communication brings community along.
- Ask the opinion of key stakeholders early when plans are still tentative.
- Too many projects have predetermined outcomes without consulting the public.
- Involvement at the earliest point is critical.
- Clear, early notification to grassroots organizations about proposed changes, allowing plenty of time to consider the issues and to make recommendation to the City, which staff people to contact with questions, and timeline for decision making.

8. Provide more time for public comment periods.

- Lengthen public comment periods, especially for OLCC liquor licensing review process.

9. Clear expectation and description of role of citizens, staff, consultants.

- The community needs to understand what they really have the power to make a difference on, what is possible and what is not possible.
- At the beginning of PI, the purpose/outcome of the involvement process needs to be clearly articulated to the participants. Reinforce when a "decision" is not up for discussion (i.e., covering the reservoir).

Citywide Public Involvement Standards Taskforce Summary of random public comments

10. Increase neighborhood association role; crime prevention, land use, etc

- Give monetary support to Neighborhood Associations/Coalitions to do outreach.
- Provide expert (attorney/consultants) advice when needed on complex issues.

11. Improve outreach efforts for minority constituencies.

- Expand awareness of role of public involvement and neighborhood associations to immigrant and refugee constituencies.
- Focus efforts to diversify neighborhood associations.
- Voices of people of color, immigrants and poor are not heard. City needs to have a plan for how to achieve and support diverse participation.

12. Expand outreach beyond Citizen Advisory Groups, Neigh Assocs.

- Broad-based outreach that is unbiased.
- As for the concern about “the same folks” always being involved, and the difficulty in getting new folks involved, that’s always going to be the case as most citizens don’t get involved until they have something personal at stake. Neighborhood association usually do not truly reflect the whole of the neighborhood.

13. Expand skills training on public involvement for staff and public.

- Provide information and training that enables citizens to identify and comprehend the issues. (See State of Oregon Land Use Goal #1)
- Produce training manuals such as “The Facilities Siting Public Involvement Manual” so citizens comprehend issues.
- Need to provide citizens with a better understanding about how to uphold their end of the responsibilities in conjunction with their rights to participate in a democratic process. We assume people know how to participate- which is rarely the case.
- Utilize ONI public involvement handbook as starting point to train city staff.

14. Ensure flexibility of standards to fit unique circumstances of projects.

- Different types of projects deserve different types of commitments. Big projects need more resources. The public should have a say over priorities.
- Formats for participation need to fit different needs and preferences of the particular community that is being reached out to.

15. Improve inter-governmental coordination on public involvement.

- Research Mayor’s Regulatory Reform effort to identify cross-over of public involvement policy making.
- Work with Port, Metro, State and Federal agencies to help fund and utilize Portland’s neighborhood association/citizen involvement program. (See State of Oregon land use Goal #1 requirement.)

Citywide Public Involvement Standards Taskforce Summary of random public comments

- Have state land use, Governor's office, county, and Metro citizens involvement committees report to our PI Taskforce about how their citizen involvement efforts work.
- METRO has public involvement standards which the City should meet when it makes project applications for funding. (Need to research!)
- On regional projects (a Tri-MET LRT or an ODOT highway) should the City have standard expectations of the regional agencies, or should the City staff do the outreach?
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16. Create Citizen Advisory Committees for bureau, capital & planning projects

- Bureau Advisory Committees should include citizens and staff so that volunteer participants can get real time feedback on what is feasible within budget constraints.
- Establish Citizen Advisory Committees representing various interests, points of view, or fields of expertise, which advise an agency or proposed actions or projects. All CAC's should have the following: (See submitted suggestions in file with Brian).
- Background: Brief statement why and how CAC formed.
- Role of CAC: Clear understanding of limitations of group.
- CAC composition: Composed of interested stakeholders, neigh assoc
- Schedule or Timeline: Respect and recognize people's time.

17. Hold City Council meetings in the evenings.

- Evening hearings for Council meetings.
- Council meetings need to be held in the evenings and rotated among neighborhoods. Working people cannot go in the daytime.

18. Refer issues with strong opposition back to neighborhoods for a vote.

- Give neighborhood associations veto authority that would have to go to referendum to resolve conflicts between a bureau and neighborhood.

19. Create standard evaluation and feedback process.

- Have standard evaluation template so that bureaus would continually and consistently gather feedback on their processes. Matt Emlen provided template.
- Include one or two questions in Auditor's Office yearly Service Efforts and Accomplishments Survey which tracks perceptions of the City's performance of providing services. e.g. Rate City for "Keeping citizens

Citywide Public Involvement Standards Taskforce Summary of random public comments

informed about key decisions” or “understanding the views of people in your neighborhood”.

20. Each bureau needs a written public involvement policy document.

- Develop a project initiation template/checklist for City PI projects. Use them to specify the purpose of their public involvement project and outline who will be involved and what outreach tools will be used.

21. Provide multiple involvement opportunities to meet public’s busy schedules.

- Meetings should be scheduled at a variety of times and days of the week ideally more evening meetings to permit people a genuine opportunity to comment, since work schedules vary from person to person.

22. Involve public in problem-solving efforts.

- Create a responsive PI process where public ideas become part of the plan. Everyone is proactive and a collective decision reached.
- City needs to focus on helping Neighborhood Associations help themselves to define their own problems and then help identify solutions to those problems.

23. Accountability of participants in public involvement processes.

- Where’s the accountability?

24. Increase neighborhood role in land use processes.

- Concerned about public involvement of how City applies the zoning code to itself. City often interprets the code in its favor in order to avoid having to go through a land use permit and public process.

25. Use consensus as a decision making process.

- Don’t build it without neighborhood consent.
- Do not use consensus. Change would become impossible at the neighborhood level.

26. Include public involvement program in administrators’ performance review.

- Require bureau directors to attend an orientation on principles of public involvement. It would help them ask the right questions and evaluate the quality of their public involvement effort.

27. Expand dialogue between Business and Neighborhood Associations.

- Neighborhood Associations need to get involved with schools and business issues.

Citywide Public Involvement Standards Taskforce

Summary of random public comments

28. Promote relationship building between staff and community organizations.

- Ongoing relationship building; community policing, officers visit neighborhood associations, residents get to know officers on first name basis.
- As people of color groups are defining their own issues, we need to focus on relationship building and supporting the development and leadership of communities of color.

29. Provide neutral facilitation for public involvement processes.

- City staff may not be neutral, need to have balanced agenda.

30. Minimize use of Open Houses

- Stop using Open Houses as the culmination of PI processes.

31. Create neighborhood small grants program.

- Small neighborhood grants, funding for neighborhood initiated projects, is critical.

32. Increase awareness City decision-making may take years to complete and need to respond to multiple mandates. Have PI throughout project.

- A public project may have many different elements, each performed by a different bureau with a different role/responsibility and taking many years and have to respond to Comprehensive Plan, Zoning Code, Neighborhood or Area Plans, etc. For example: Outer Southeast Community Plan, Lents Town Center Urban Renewal, etc. When we get around to a project to build something that is consistent with all those plans, not unexpectedly, it may appear citizens weren't involved in all those previous "public involvement processes" and allege we haven't done any/enough public involvement.

33. City bureaus need certainty that construction timelines are on time

- When a City bureau sets out to implement a construction/ development project, we need some degree of certainty that the project will move along as scheduled. If appropriate, a public involvement process may be planned, but it can't be too lengthy. Otherwise there can be considerable complications to construction cycles, budgets and costs - all potentially costing the taxpayers more.

34. Contracting for PI services needs to be addressed

- Once the City has let a contract for public involvement services, they should use the consultant. Often, City employees do work intended in the

Citywide Public Involvement Standards Taskforce Summary of random public comments

scope of services. Didn't realize contract services are on-call basis, irrespective of the contract and an agreed upon scope of work.

35. Provide affordable public spaces to hold meetings and events

- A dominant concern for this community is the lack of affordable space for cultural holidays that could benefit all.

36. Create system of acknowledging good public involvement work

- When staff or citizens do a credible and ethical job related to outreach, public involvement and participation they should receive acknowledgement from the top of the bureau down.

37. Other values/principles ideas for City public involvement efforts.

- The City is too focused on development when they need to focus on governing.
- Commissioners transition too fast.
- The OLCC is ignoring the saturation of liquor licenses in neighborhoods.
- In searching for a "successful" public involvement process (to emulate) I assert one's opinion depends totally on the outcome of the project (not the process) and whether or not the person you're asking liked or didn't like the outcome. We shouldn't presume that we can develop a 'perfect' process because that's the first thing citizens blame - "the process" - when the 'decision' doesn't go their way.