

# Public Participation Policy Plan

**“Community planning can be only as successful as its support by the general public.”**

## INTRODUCTION

The goal of this policy plan is to encourage early and continuous public notification about and participation in major actions and decisions by the Douglas County Regional Planning Commission. This plan establishes consistent, minimum procedures to accomplish this goal; procedures beyond these minimums may be applied as warranted and are encouraged.

The term “major” is to be applied loosely. If a proposed action or decision is clearly a normal-course-of-business activity that does not significantly affect the public or alter public policy, it may not be necessary to apply these procedures. However, if there is a question as to whether these procedures should be followed, then the planning commission should follow them to ensure appropriate public notification and participation.

Early involvement includes creating meaningful opportunities along the way for people to get involved. However, this does not imply that every citizen process will be the same. Citizen participation processes should be designed to identify, disseminate and address the specific nature of the proposal. The intensity of the citizen participation process may vary depending on the level or geographical nature of the project, community issues, or even the perceived impacts to a neighborhood.

Broad citizen participation implies using every reasonable tool available to encourage involvement. However, the effectiveness of these tools and the overall program depends on many variables, including:

- a) Programs tailored to your audience. The process will need different approaches to reach all kinds of people from the broad general public to the most affected groups or individuals;
- b) Set clear objectives. No matter what the level of interest or involvement, information for audiences must be accessible and easy to understand; and
- c) Monitor the program. For every program, a new strategy may be employed to get citizens involved.

The Planning Commission will use a broad range of public information and participation opportunities. Public information and participation opportunities

include dissemination of proposals and alternatives, processes for written comments, public meetings/hearings after effective notice, settings for open discussion, communication programs, information services and consideration of and responses to public comments.

The following principles are to help guide the Planning Commission, public notification and participation activities.

## **PRINCIPLES**

1. All major public policy decisions or large implementation projects will affect many people.
2. Professionals, elected officials, agencies and organizations do not have a monopoly on good solutions.
3. Even if a project or policy decision is sensible and beneficial, it must be arrived at properly and fairly to be acceptable.
4. People are much more willing to live with a decision that affects different interests unequally if the decision-making process is open, objective and considers all viewpoints.
5. Interacting with an official representative of an organization or group may not substitute for interacting directly with the organization or group.
6. Effective public notification and participation takes time and effort, and can be expensive, yet is essential to sound decision-making.
7. Financial constraints should be reasonably considered in designing participation programs.

## **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND NOTIFICATION PROCEDURES**

A variety of public notification and participation procedures will be used to encourage the early and continuous involvement of citizens, jurisdictions, communities and other interests in the planning process. To ensure early and continuous involvement, the process will include, but is not limited to the following:

### **I. General key procedures**

1. Pursuant to state law the Planning Commission will provide “Citizens, affected public/private agencies, organizations, other interested parties, and segments of the community affected by plans, programs and projects with reasonable” notice of and an opportunity to comment on the proposed plan or program.

3. Efforts to fulfill this requirement will include opportunities for interested parties to be involved in the early stages of plan, program and policy development. These efforts may include meetings, workshops, surveys, open houses, other public forums, or methods to provide opportunities for the public to learn about and participate in plan, program and policy development. The citizen participation process will be designed to address the specific nature of the proposal. The intensity of the citizen participation process may vary depending on the level or geographical nature of the project, neighborhoods, community issues, or perceived impact to properties.
4. These efforts will include publication of appropriate documents, public notice of availability of such documents, and/or other methods to make them available for public review. They also will include notice as to where to send written comments, and who at the agency will receive written comments and can provide additional information.
5. Consistent with these procedures and the philosophy of this Public Participation Policy Plan, the Planning Commission will establish a public participation process for each of its key decisions. This process will include a public review period of at least 20 days for review of key decision documents, between the release of a draft and final action. Copies of written comments received during this time will be made available to members of the body taking final action.

## **II. Hearings; decisions or actions**

1. Public hearings shall be conducted in a manner prescribed above and as set forth in the Douglas County Code (DCC) Title 14, Section 14.10.050 "Legislative review of applications" and Chapter 36.70A RCW.
2. All decisions or actions will comply with all other provisions of the Open Public Meetings Act (RCW 42.30), the State Environmental Policy Act (RCW 43.21C), the state Growth Management Act (RCW 36.70A), and any and all other applicable federal and state laws.
3. Public notification of all hearings will be provided at least 10 days before the date of the hearing. The notice shall be published in a paper of general circulation and the legal paper of the County. The notice shall include the date, time, location and purpose of the hearing. If applicable, the notice shall include the SEPA threshold determination issued by the responsible department.

### **III. Workshop/Meetings**

1. Public notification of all workshops and/or meetings of the Planning Commission (which usually occur monthly) will be provided at least 15 days before each workshop and/ or meeting.
2. Public notification will include sending a copy of the notice or agenda to the news media and associate member cities. The notice or agenda will include the time, date, location and purpose of the workshop or meeting.
3. A public comment period will be provided during each regular workshop or meeting; however, the Board Chair may establish comment time limits. In addition the Planning Commission, at their discretion, may allow additional time periods for written comments, or provide other options for public comment on specific issues as needed. The time frame for written comments shall not be less than 15 days.
  - (a) Anyone who wants to receive an agenda of an upcoming workshop or meeting may receive one at no charge. A reasonable fee may be charged for other materials.
  - (b) A sign-up sheet will be available for the public at every workshop or meeting for the purposes of creating mailing lists to keep people informed.
4. Minor changes to the agenda may be made up to 7 days before the meeting.
5. All workshops, meetings, open houses and other events will be conducted in facilities that are accessible to persons with disabilities.

### **IV. Emergency hearing/meeting/workshop**

Announcements of an emergency hearing/meeting/workshop may necessitate an alternative notification format. However, all such emergencies will comply with local, state and federal requirements.

### **V. News Release/Public Service Announcement (PSA)**

News releases and other pertinent information, as appropriate will be sent to the news media, public & private agencies, business and civic organization news letters and organizations in the region for major upcoming actions. The news release will include the date, time, location, purpose of the event and a contact person.

- (a) News releases may be posted on display boards, as appropriate, at local shopping centers, libraries, schools, and other similar areas.
- (b) Anyone requesting a copy of a news release will receive one free-of-charge.

## **VI. Other Publications**

1. A wide variety of other publications, including reports, maps, and other informational media will be produced as needed and made available to news media, agencies, member jurisdictions and other interested parties.
  - (a) These publications will include technical and policy information documents, as needed.
  - (b) When appropriate, a charge may be levied for copies. The charge will cover the approximate cost of producing and (if applicable) mailing the publication.
  - (c) When appropriate, copies will be made available at the local library and other public locations, for public inspection.
  - (d) Reports, documents, publications and other pertinent material will be on file at the Douglas County Transportation and Land Services Department for public review during normal business hours.

## **VII. Other Public Notification and Participation Efforts**

1. The Planning Commission will conduct workshops, seminars, forums and other events, as appropriate, to provide public opportunities for comment, suggestions, ideas and concerns.
2. The Planning Commission will encourage public comment and participation through advisory committees, presentations to civic groups, and other efforts as appropriate.
3. Some elements of the Planning Commission involve compiling projects and networking with many agencies and jurisdictions throughout the region. The Planning Commission will work with local jurisdictions to ensure that the public in those jurisdictions are notified and involved at the local level, to provide effective opportunities for early and continuous participation.

## **Public Participation Policy Plan**

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**The Douglas County Regional Planning Commission strongly believes that the Citizen Participation Plan will further the interests of the public by improving public notification and participation efforts and will encourage early and continuous public notification and participation for major actions and decisions of the County. Therefore, the Planning Commission formally recommends to the Board of County Commissioners that the Public Participation Policy Plan be adopted for all departments within the County.**