Long Range Planning
Community Engagement Framework

Introduction

The Community Engagement Framework will be used by the Planning Division, and their consultants, to create engagement plans for projects including but not limited to periodic updates of the Comprehensive Plan, Shoreline Master Program or Critical Areas Ordinance, creation of or amendments to a subarea plan, and creation of or amendments to development regulations.

The goal of the framework is to pledge consistent, meaningful and timely engagement of the Lewis County community in planning projects that have a direct and indirect impact on their homes, businesses and lives. By following the framework, staff and decision makers will be held accountable to the public we serve.

What is Community Engagement?

Community engagement is a process that ensures citizens and interested parties have a meaningful role in the discussions, deliberations, decision-making and implementation of projects and programs affecting them and their community. Leaders, including the government, have a responsibly to engage and empower citizens and interested parties.

The Department of Community Development, Planning Division, engages citizen and interested parties in the following community planning efforts:
1. Visioning to consider how communities will grow and change over time;
2. Goal setting to determine if the vision is being met;
3. Policy development to guide changes to rules and regulations; and
4. Creating or amending zoning designations and development regulations to implement the community's vision, goals and policies.

Community engagement takes many forms and can be viewed as a spectrum ranging from informing the community about projects or plans, to fully collaborating with the community to develop the project or plan (Figure 1). A engagement plan should encourage community members to self-select the level of involvement they would like to have. The community should feel welcome and that their involvement will have a meaningful impact on the project or plan.

Figure 1: Public Engagement Spectrum

Inform	Involve	Collaborate
Website	Surveys	Committees
Enews	Interviews	Focus Groups
Social Media	Community Meetings	Workshops

Why is Community Engagement Important?

Community engagement increases the visibility and understanding of issues and empowers people to collaborate on decisions that affect their lives, their towns, cities and neighborhoods. There are many benefits of effective community engagement:
- Builds cohesive communities
- Leads to better outcomes
- Drives social transformation
- Promotes sustainable results
- Provides access to decision makers

Packwood Subarea Plan Community Meeting, October 2023

Principles of Community Engagement

The principles below will guide the Planning Division, or their consultants, in establishing a meaningful, effective and high-quality engagement plan.

Partnership: Community members have a right to be involved in decisions that affect them. Participants can influence decision-making and receive feedback on how their input was used. The public can recommend issues for government consideration.

Early Involvement: Public involvement is an early and integral part of issue and opportunity identification, concept development, design, and implementation of visions, goals, policies, and programs.

Building Relationships and Community Capacity: Public involvement processes invest in and develop long-term, collaborative working relationships and learning opportunities with community partners and stakeholders.

Inclusiveness and Equity: Public dialogue and decision-making processes identify, reach out to, and encourage participation of the community in its full diversity. Processes respect a range of values and interests and the knowledge of those involved. Historically excluded individuals and groups are included authentically in processes, activities, and decision- and policy-making. Impacts, including costs and benefits, are identified and distributed fairly.

Good Quality Process Design and Implementation: Public involvement processes and techniques are well-designed to appropriately fit the scope, character, and impact of a policy or program. Processes adapt to changing needs and issues as they move forward.

Transparency: Public decision-making processes are accessible, open, honest, and understandable. Members of the public receive the information they need, and with enough lead time, to participate effectively.

Accountability: County leaders and staff are accountable for ensuring meaningful public involvement in the work of county government.
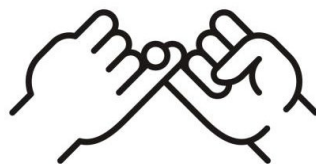
"Engagement is a promise to the community."

Types of Community Engagement

The Planning Division uses the following types of engagement; however, other engagement tools and methods may also be used. Not all types of engagement are appropriate for every project or plan. Staff will work with citizens and interested parties at the beginning of a project or plan to determine which types of engagement will be the most effective for the community.

The amount of commitment required by the community is rated 1(low) to 5(high). And the amount of influence the community will have over the outcome is also rated 1(low) to 5(high). For example, single touch points, such as a person attending one open house, is low commitment and low influence because the participant is simply learning about the project or plan. As compared to a person attending monthly advisory committee meetings, which is a high commitment and a high level of influence. A online survey, is low commitment and medium influence, if the results of the online survey are used to make adjustments to the project or plan.

Community Meetings
Community meetings provide an opportunity to consult with large numbers of people. Meetings can be organized to allow for small group discussions with group feedback or large group discussions. There are often opportunities for participants to set or influence the agenda and to ask questions. Small group break-outs are an essential element of community meetings because larger group discussion are often intimidating and discourage participation. Meetings and small group break outs should be facilitated to help people explore issues, build consensus or identify areas of conflict. Reporting out by the facilitator and allowing reactions from the larger group is essential to ensuring all points of view are heard. Commitment = 2; Influence = 3.

Type of community meetings include:
- Project Hosted – The Planning Division, or their consultant, hosts the meeting and invites the participants. The agenda is set by the staff. These can take the form of an open house, information session or charrette.
- Community Hosted – A community group invites staff or their consultant to attend an existing meeting. The agenda is set by the community group. These may be an existing business association meeting, homeowners' association meeting, Chamber of Commerce, Rotary, church group, etc.
- Community Events – Staff or their consultant asks to attend an existing event, such as a community craft fair or farmer's market, to provide information about the project or program. There is no set agenda. This usually includes a single table with project information and staff who discuss with community one-on-one.

Housing Forum on Short Term Rentals, March 2022

Community Mapping

Maps and photographs of an area or specific location are used to illustrate how people view their community, what they like or dislike, and what improvements they would like to see. Ideas are generated in small group discussions or via surveys and recorded on maps and charts. Community mapping is a useful way to engage people of all levels of capability. A variety of aspects can be mapped including land use, community assets, facilities, and transport options to develop a snapshot of an area. Commitment = 2; Influence = 2.

Workshops and Focus Groups

Workshops and focus groups allow people to discuss their ideas in an open and relaxed atmosphere. Workshops can take a variety of formats. They can be designed to exchange information; to discuss the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of an idea or project; to obtain ideas and innovative thinking for a way forward for a project; or they can be specifically geared towards prioritization and the production of an action plan. Focus groups by contrast are designed to specifically concentrate on a single issue or a subset of topics. Workshops and Focus Groups are useful methods for encouraging discussion among those who may feel less confident in a larger group. The main benefit is that participants or certain interest who are often excluded from a wider engagement exercise can be identified and invited to attend this type of event. Commitment = 2; Influence = 4.

Focus Group in breakout sessions drew ideas for topics, such as housing, on a map. June 2022.

Interviews

Interviews are usually defined as a conversation with a purpose. They can be very helpful to gain information about assumptions and perceptions of activities in the community. Interviews are also great at gaining in-depth information on a particular topic from an expert. Using an interview is the best way to have an accurate and thorough communication of ideas. Commitment = 2; Influence = 3.

Advisory Committees

An advisory committee is a temporary group that forms to guide the project or plan and provide a recommendation to an appointed commission or decision-making body. Technical advisory committees are made up of topic-specific technical experts that typically provide data and review outputs. Community advisory committees are typically geographic based and include residents, businesses owner and other interested parties. Advisory committees should have a charter that lays out roles, responsibilities and how decision making will be done. Advisory committees must be facilitated to ensure all members have an opportunity to fully engage. Advisory committees meet regularly, such as once a month for two hours, during the project's timeline. Commitment = 5; Influence = 5.

Surveys
Questionnaire surveys can be used to identify the needs and views of a large number of people in a standard format. The main stages involved are: defining the sample size and the type of information required; deciding on the type of survey to be used (postal, drop and collect, telephone or interview); survey design; piloting the survey; undertaking the survey and post-completion analysis of the results. It is often best to use a short and concise questionnaire where people's views on an issue are being sought. Surveys are best used with other methods, by themselves they can be limited in scope and provide little meaningful community engagement. Adding a survey to a community meeting will increase the influence of both the community meeting and the survey. Commitment = 2; Influence = 2.

Email Enews
Enews emails are less about engagement and more about providing information and encouraging people to engage in another method, such as inviting people to a community meeting or providing a link to an online survey. Because people are overwhelmed by social media in today's environment, it is best to create email lists that are specific to a topic or a project. Information provided in the email should be concise and to the point with links to other engagement options, such as a website. Be careful not to send too many emails; people will begin to ignore frequent email blasts. Commitment = 1; Influence = 1.

Social Media
Like enews, social media posts are used to provide information and encourage people to engage in another method, such as an upcoming community meeting or a link to an online survey. Web based activities enable people to choose where, when and for how long they want to participate. Social media is particularly useful for those who may be homebound e.g. care-takers, elderly people, parents with young children. Social media posts can reach large numbers of people, but are less time consuming than attending a workshop or public meeting. Commitment = 1; Influence = 1.

Website
It is necessary to create project or topic specific webpages in order to convey information to the community. The website becomes the "home base" where all information is stored. The Community Development website (https://lewiscountywa.gov/departments/community-development/) will serve as a platform through which the community and other stakeholders can access general project information, meeting notices and upcoming events, planning and learning resources, and interim work products. The community must choose to visit the webpage to learn about the project or plan. Links to the webpage should be included in all engagement. Commitment = 0; Influence = 0.

<u>Newspapers</u>
Although electronic information sharing continues to increase, newspapers and newsletters still remain a highly viable vehicle for disseminating information within communities. The Lewis County Newsletter will be used to share information about projects and plans, and how the community can engage. Community Development will provide a brief narrative on upcoming meetings for distribution as a "press release" to The Chronicle and other local print media. Commitment = 0; Influence = 0.

Steps to Develop a Community Engagement Plan

For each project or plan undertaken by the Planning Division, or their consultant, a Community Engagement Plan (CEP) will be created. The goal of the CEP is to describe how the community will be engaged and at what points specific tools will be used. The community should have an opportunity to weigh in on the CEP itself and make suggestions about how to best achieve effective engagement.

The Planning Division works with the Planning Commission, Board of County Commissions, other local elected officials and the public to prepare for long-term growth, protect natural resources, maintain agricultural, forest and mineral resource lands, reduce urban sprawl and comply with state and federal laws. In order to effectively reach these goals, community engagement is essential. This CEP will guide outreach for the planning process of Lewis County. Public involvement efforts will include a variety of stakeholders with varying interests to inform the public in the planning process, as well as the schedule for implementing engagement tools.

The CEP will include, at a minimum, the following information.

1. <u>Description of the overall Project or Plan:</u>
The CEP should begin with an executive summary of the project or plan. Consider this an "elevator speech." Take time developing the summary so that it can be copied and used in other formats, such as handouts, email blasts, social media posts, etc. The overall description should include the purpose/goal of the project or plan, the process for creating the project or plan, who will be making decisions and a general timeline.

Always use accessible and inclusive language, avoid jargon and spell out all acronyms. Do not assume the community understands project terminology. Be aware of community members for whom English is a second language. Consider translating the executive summary, as well as handouts, into the top two to three languages spoken in the community.

2. Describe the Interests and Impacts

Before you can determine what engagement is needed, you must first determine who is interested and who is impacted by the project or plan. In general, the higher the level of public interest and the larger the impact of your project, the more robust your CEP should be. At the same time, there may be cases where the interest in your project or issue is low, but you need it to be higher. In this case, you may need to integrate tools such as social media campaigns that can help you generate public interest.

To determine the level of interest, it is helpful to conduct a stakeholder analysis. In general, you want to determine who the main stakeholders for your project are. It is also important to determine how organized your stakeholders are. For example, are they represented by a neighborhood committee or an industry organization? Organized stakeholders will be in a better position to express their perspective on your project. Unorganized stakeholders are not always in a good position to be involved and may need more attention in your CEP.

There also may be stakeholders who you need to be engagement, but who have traditionally not been at the table. If this is true, you will need to build in special tools, such as focus groups or other specialized outreach, to bring these groups into the conversation. Finally, as you are determining the level of interest, you should research whether there is an existing level of controversy or public conflict about the issue your project or plan addresses.

As you are considering the impacts of your project, you should think about the positive and negative impacts, the direct and indirect impacts and the short- and long-term impacts to different stakeholders. It is important to also consider which group of stakeholders will experience which types of impacts. You will find that projects and plans, especially complex ones, will have multiple different types of impacts on multiple different types of stakeholders. Also, different types of impacts will necessitate different public engagement tactics and strategies. For example, a long-range planning policy may influence a wide array of stakeholders but not have any direct impact on development. Whereas, a change to a development regulation may impacted fewer stakeholders but have a direct impact on future development or property values. A good CEP will recognize the need for a multi-pronged approach based on a project's different impacts on different stakeholders.

3. Describe the Engagement Needed

Now that you have identified who is interested and who is impacted, you need to determine what is needed from stakeholders to ensure that your project or plan will be successful? How you answer this question will help to determine the type of public involvement strategies that you adopt.

Below are some things to keep in mind while describing engagement needed:
    a. Include diverse perspectives and engage community champions in the process.
    b. Be transparent throughout all phases of the planning process.
    c. Promote civil/civic conversation to seek common ground whenever possible.
    d. Reinforce face-to-face communication by having events that promote interaction outside of structured meetings.
    e. Provide multiple and meaningful ways to engage including, but not limited to, interactive meeting formats, web-based educational materials, and focused group discussions.
    f. Strengthen community understanding of planning terms and processes.

4. What is the promise to the public?

Be very clear about the level of community engagement you are promising your stakeholders. Members of the public get rightly frustrated when a CEP promises a specific level of engagement, but then delivers something different. It is important to be transparent and authentic with your stakeholders. Respect their time and do not over-promise.

Here is a break-down of the different types of promises typically made to the public. This is based on work done by the International Association for Public Participation.
    a. Promise to inform: Staff will keep the community well informed from start to finish.
    b. Promise to consult: Staff will keep the community well informed. In addition, staff will listen and acknowledge your input and concerns. Furthermore, staff will let the community know if and how your input influenced our decisions.
    c. Promise to involve: Staff promises to consult with specific stakeholders and make sure that their needs and concerns are directly reflected in the plans, approaches and/or alternatives that are developed. Furthermore, staff will let stakeholders know how their input influenced the bureau's decisions.
    d. Promise to partner: Staff promises to gather the advice and innovative ideas from the community and incorporate them into the project, initiative or plan's decisions to the maximum extent possible.
    e. Promise to empower: Staff promises to implement what you, the community, decide. The community becomes a full advisory committee that makes a formal decision about what if anything will be forwarded to the Planning Commission and BOCC.

You may chose different promises for different stakeholder groups or for different engagement tools. For example, for an advisory committee you may choose a "promise to partner", but for a community meeting you may choose "promise to consult."

5. Engagement Strategy

Now that you know your stakeholders, what you need from them and what level of engagement you will take, you are ready to design your engagement strategy. The overarching goal of the strategy should be making sure all interested and impacted stakeholders understands how and when they can engage with the project and how their engagement will be reflected in the end products.

You should match your strategy with key decisions and other milestones. Identify how you will engage at each stage with different interest groups and people. Identify the tools that will be used. Be sure that you provide adequate time for engagement and to update stakeholders on how their feedback influenced the project. Transparency and accountability means making sure everyone knows how their input was or wasn't used.

6. Decision Making

Be clear about who is making key decisions and how those decisions impact the project. Be clear about when a stakeholder group is empowered to make decisions and when the decisions are made by someone else. This will help everyone set their expectations about their involvement. You should identify the key decisions and decision makers for each phase of your project.

For example, you may empower your advisory committee to decide on the draft plan. You may jointly agree on a decision-making approach, such as simple majority vote, to approve forwarding the draft plan. However, the final decision maker may be the Board of County Commissioners and they may have the power to change anything in the draft plan the advisory committee created. This needs to be clearly articulated to the advisory committee at the beginning of the process, and they should be reminded as the plan moves into the adoption phase.

7. Budget

You should brainstorm where spending will occur to carry out the CEP. As considerations of impact, interest, and equity increase so too should the budget allocated to the CEP. Costs will include materials, handouts, equipment, legal notices, etc. Additionally, consider budgeting for childcare, transportation, and food so that events are accessible.

Important Reminders about Community Engagement

The following reminders should guide you as you develop your CEP. These reminders should be reviewed when you are designing a specific engagement tool, such as a community meeting. At the end of the process, not all stakeholders will feel that their interests were fully met but they should feel that their voice was heard and thoroughly considered.

1. Build personal relationships with individual stakeholders or interest groups. To do this, you should identify key constituents that your organization either has a relationship with or should be building a relationship with. You should consider events to attend or venues to visit where you can identify natural community leaders.
2. Create a welcoming atmosphere. To determine whether your proposed process achieves this, ask yourself if your process reflects, honors and welcomes the community and if the venues for your events are invite participation and engagement.
3. Increase accessibility. It is important to eliminate or minimize barriers to participation such as language, childcare, food, time of day and transportation.
4. Develop alternative methods for engagement. To encourage participation, it may be necessary to adopt non-traditional methods of outreach. If you are not getting participation from a identify interest group or stakeholder, shift your approach.
5. Maintain a presence within the community. You will receive better input if you demonstrate to the communities that historically have not been at the table that you are committed to building a strong, respectful relationship. You should consider having a presence at community events. It is also valuable to establish places in the community where people can have sustained, informal interactions with you.
6. Partner with diverse organizations and agencies. Go beyond what you typically see as the interested groups and stakeholders. Actively seek out others that have not been involved and ask them if they want to be involved and how best to engage with them. Remember that you are here to serve the public, not the other way around.