

MAKING



Public Participation
in a New Comprehensive Plan

Table of Contents

1 Introduction 5

2 Public Participation 7

3 Media, Education, and Discussion Tools 13

4 Public Participation Tools..... 17

5 Key Public Participation Events..... 19

6 Transparency and Documentation 22

7 Monitoring and Feedback..... 23

Welcome to Your Future

The City of Austin's citizens are about to embark on a very exciting journey. Over the next 18 months, elected and appointed leaders, residents, business people, city staff, civic groups, community volunteers, and many others will engage in a discussion about our values as a city and our aspirations for the future. This discussion will articulate a vision for Austin's future and guide the development of a new Comprehensive Plan that will drive the way the City grows, spends, and conserves its resources.

To citizens who were involved in pre-planning activities (e.g., the August 5, 2009 workshop), thank you. Your input directly shaped this Public Participation Plan. To citizens who will become involved as the planning process officially kicks off, welcome.



What the Comprehensive Plan Is

- ☒ An expression of the Austin community's shared values, aspirations, and vision for the future.
- ☒ The policy foundation for decision-making by the City and its partners to proactively manage growth and change.
- ☒ The City's "to-do" list defining a citywide action program and priorities to be implemented over time to achieve the vision.

What the Comprehensive Plan is Not

- ☐ A replacement of existing neighborhood, corridor, or other geographically specific plans (rather, it provides a policy framework to be taken into account in preparing or revising such plans in the future).
- ☐ A specific proposal for changing land use or zoning (again, the comprehensive plan sets the framework for undertaking such changes).

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background on the Austin Comprehensive Plan

A comprehensive plan defines a city's public policies related to growth and development. It takes a broad, community-wide perspective, often referred to as a "30,000 foot view," as opposed to more detailed neighborhood, corridor, or area plans that deal with specific parcels and projects (e.g., filling gaps in the sidewalk network or undertaking specific park improvements). Austin's new comprehensive plan will establish a framework and action program for the City as a whole, to be implemented over a period of years to achieve the vision articulated by citizens.

The Austin City Charter spells out specific items that need to be incorporated into the City's comprehensive plan. According to Article X: "Planning" of the City of Austin Charter,

The council shall adopt by ordinance a comprehensive plan, which shall constitute the master and general plan. The Comprehensive Plan shall contain the council's policies for growth, development and beautification of the land within the corporate limits and the extraterritorial jurisdiction of the city, or for the geographic portions thereof including neighborhood, community and area wide plans.

The comprehensive plan shall include the following elements (although additional elements may be included):

1. *A future land use element*
2. *A traffic circulation and mass transit element*
3. *A wastewater, solid waste, drainage and potable water element*
4. *A conservation and environmental resources element*
5. *A recreation and open space element*
6. *A housing element*
7. *A public service and facilities element, which shall include but not be limited to a capital improvement program*
8. *A public buildings and related facilities element*
9. *An economic element for commercial and industrial development and redevelopment*
10. *A health and human service element*

Austin's current comprehensive plan of record, the *Austin Tomorrow Comprehensive Plan*, was first adopted in 1979 and most recently updated in 2008. The 2008 *Interim Update* incorporated City Council policies and replaced the 1979 Growth Areas Map with an updated Growth Areas Map. The need to create a new Comprehensive Plan became increasingly clear during the process of developing the 2008 Update. Although the plan contained themes that are as relevant today as they were in the 1970s, such as neighborhood and environmental protection, much of the plan is dated and a product of the time in which it was written. In addition, since the plan's initial adoption, a number of issues have emerged that were not foreseen in the 1970s. Homelessness, diminishing automobile mobility, climate change, and an affordable housing supply that cannot meet the growing demand are among the issues of concern for current and future Austinites.

¹ The ETJ is the unincorporated land within five miles of Austin's boundary that is not within the city limits or ETJ of another city. It is the territory where Austin alone is authorized to annex land.

Moving Forward with a New Comprehensive Plan

In their 2009-2010 annual budget, the Austin City Council apportioned funds to create a new Comprehensive Plan for the City. On April 23, 2009, Wallace Roberts and Todd, LLC (WRT) was selected to lead a consultant team to work with the City of Austin, the citizens of Austin, and residents of its extra-territorial jurisdiction (ETJ)¹ to create a new Comprehensive Plan (see Figure 1). City Council set three overarching goals to guide the process of preparing the plan:

1. **Community Engagement:** The planning process will include multiple ways of engaging the public, with the overall goal of developing a plan that reflects the values and aspirations of the entire Austin community.
2. **Sustainability:** The planning process will define what sustainability means specifically for Austin and the aspirations of Austinites for a sustainable future environment, economy, and community.
3. **Implementation:** The planning process will incorporate a strategic focus on implementation, culminating in formulation of a realistic action agenda and benchmarks to measure progress in achieving the vision.

The end result is expected to be a landmark plan and model for other communities to use in charting a course towards a sustainable future.

This public participation plan defines a framework for achieving the first goal—involving the Austin community in developing a plan that will be vitally important to the City's future. Towards that end, it defines:

- Guiding principles and objectives; participants and their roles in the planning process (Chapter 2)
- Outreach, education, and discussion tools to be used to reach and inform residents (Chapter 3)
- Public participation tools to be used to actively engage residents in providing public input (Chapter 4)
- Key public participation events in the process (Chapter 5)
- Measures to be taken to document the planning process and provide a transparent record of results (Chapter 6)

"About the Comprehensive Plan"



CHAPTER 2

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

Guiding Philosophy/
Principles of the Public
Participation Plan

Objectives

Targeted Audiences

Key Participants and
Their Roles

Decision-Making

This section lays out the guiding philosophy and objectives of the Public Participation Plan, as well as the roles of those who will be involved throughout the process. The plan is based on two principles of participation: 1) The plan will reflect the values and aspirations which citizens will be invited to express in a multitude of ways throughout the planning process; and 2) The process will engage members of the public who are not usually involved in city planning and decisions.

The goal of the Participation Plan is to create a framework to solicit public input to create a new Comprehensive Plan for Austin. This new plan should give clear direction for future policies, be rooted in Austin's broad common ground, and incorporate, where possible, new approaches to bringing together Austin's diverse interests.

Guiding Philosophy

These following principles provide the foundation upon which the public participation program is built.

- **Open to All:** Participation in the development of the comprehensive plan is open and inclusive of all of Austin and its extraterritorial jurisdiction. Participation is encouraged across geographic, demographic, financial, and other lines. Because different people have different experiences, preferences, constraints, and capacities to participate, being open to all requires having multiple ways to participate.
- **Community Engagement:** Beyond staff and the consultant reaching out, talking with, and listening to the community, the community engages with itself, across the traditional lines that divide Austin. This happens across the process, but also within specific events (e.g., the community forum series).
- **Transparency:** Participants see their input reflected in the outcomes from meetings and events and see how those outcomes shape and influence the plan.
- **Enthusiastic and Vibrant:** The process welcomes and encourages enthusiasm, as a foundation for becoming an increasingly vibrant city.
- **Engaging Underrepresented Groups:** For traditionally hard-to-reach groups (e.g., younger citizens, families with children, renters, Spanish speakers, and residents who hold more than one job and have little free time) a concerted effort will be made to take participation opportunities directly to them—where they live, work, and gather. Among planned activities are community forums held at varied times and in geographically dispersed locations, the use of social media, leveraging the relationships of community leaders and institutional partners to reach targeted populations, and periodic focus groups.
- **Fun:** The planning process need not be a dry one. In fact, it can be enjoyable and even entertaining. By creating opportunities for the community to have fun together, the planning team will inspire trust, ownership, and commitment to the process. Appealing venues, music, visuals, energetic activities, concurrent youth events, and the opportunity to meet new “neighbors” are among the ways that fun will be interjected into activities.

The following objectives are the ends to which public participation efforts are directed:

Build understanding of the project and credibility for the process.

Strategy: A variety of outreach and educational tools will help create public understanding of the planning process and the important role the community will play in that process. Credibility will be built by a number of actions, including program transparency, effective branding, community ambassadors (e.g., Comprehensive Plan Citizens Advisory Task Force members, community leaders, and even local celebrities), media coverage, and an obvious connection between input and outcomes.

Provide numerous and varied opportunities for public participation and input.

Strategy: The program will offer a variety of participation methods, hold events in geographically diverse locations, partner with diverse individuals and organizations to expand opportunities to participate, and encourage community members to engage with one another. Dialogue will be decentralized.

Understand the needs and interests of the City's diverse constituency.

Strategy: Attention will be given to both those traditionally involved audiences as well as to groups who are traditionally less involved. While typically underrepresented groups can be challenging to reach, there are tools built into the planning process to ensure diversity of input. Citizens representing these groups, including those who live in Austin's extraterritorial jurisdiction, young adults, ethnic and racial minorities, and those without a college education will be recruited to participate in focus group discussions. Additionally, these groups will have representation on the Comprehensive Plan Citizen's Advisory Task Force, and community leaders within these populations will be recruited to serve as "relayers," spreading the word about public participation opportunities and collecting hard-copy comment forms at meetings and events.

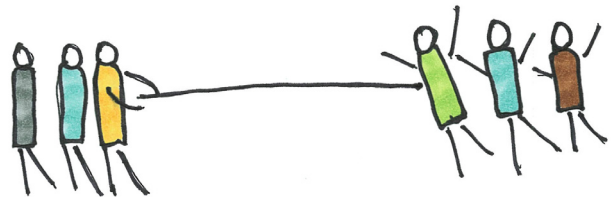
Carefully consider input and show a clear connection between input and outcomes.

Strategy: A well-structured system of documentation and transparency will keep the public informed about the development of the plan as it unfolds, accounting for how public input is collected and how that input is used in the subsequent phase of the planning process. Graphic representations of the process and timeline will be displayed in public facilities and online allowing the community to tangibly see how the plan evolves.

We recognize that these public participation principles and objectives aspire to a high standard. We also understand that the constraints of available time and resources may, at times, cause us to fall short of these ideals. However, by working together, our collective community efforts will yield an exceptional public experience and a strong Comprehensive Plan.

Targeted Audiences

Residents in the City of Austin and those in its ETJ are targeted for outreach and participation. Special efforts will be made to ensure that the voices of typically underrepresented groups are heard in the planning process. These groups include minority populations, non-English speakers, families with children, seniors, people with disabilities, and residents living outside the urban core who have not been traditionally engaged in community planning activities. Outreach and education tools are outlined in Section III of this document. These tools will be appropriately modified to reach underrepresented groups as well as the general population.



Key Participants and Their Roles

A well-orchestrated public participation program requires a team effort. Following are the key participants on that team and the roles they will play in the process.

Citizens

Members of the community are asked to engage in civil discourse about issues that affect current reality and dictate what Austin will be in the future. Citizens include not only residents, but also members of Austin's business and corporate communities, as well as its non-profit and advocacy communities. They are asked to communicate their interests, listen to diverse viewpoints, understand constraints and trade-offs, and help in defining the common ground. Most of all, they should bring Austin's enthusiasm, vibrancy, and openness into the process. Individual citizens who wish to become more involved may consider becoming project volunteers or partners. The process should accommodate every level of participation, including:

► Dedicated participants

These are members of the public who are dedicated to close involvement throughout the planning process. Dedicated participants attend all (or most) major participation opportunities, are likely to be active on the project website, and are the most likely to attend a Planning Commission, Comprehensive Plan Citizen Advisory Task Force, or City Council meeting. Dedicated participants are crucial to this process, because they provide "experts in the field," and serve as conduits between the planning team and the community.

► Occasional participants

These are members of the public who are committed to the process, but limit themselves primarily to the major avenues for participation. They attend most of the Community Forums, stay abreast of the process online or at the library, and may even attend a few outside meetings.

► Infrequent participants

These are people without much time, who are nevertheless able to attend one or two community forums. These participants are crucial, because they are likely to come from hard-to-reach communities without the time or ability to participate frequently. However, they are also more difficult to include for two reasons. First, because they are unlikely to have followed the process from the start, they will need more contextual information at each step. Second, because they are less likely to follow-up, their input needs to be weighed carefully with that of dedicated and occasional participants, who can repeat their positions throughout the process. To address these issues, orientation sessions will be scheduled to brief new participants on contextual information and decisions previously made during the process. By capturing the interests and needs of all participants (and participant groups) the draft plan can address the common interests of all segments of the community.



Partners

The City will recruit partners from the public and private sectors. These partners will help extend the reach of the public participation process and provide valuable outreach and input opportunities to the public. They may also provide venues, food, and/or entertainment for community events. One of Austin's strengths is its enormous civic entrepreneurialism. The Comprehensive Plan welcomes unaffiliated efforts at promoting discussion, outreach, and passion among the public. The following denotes varying partnership opportunities:

► Community Leaders

Citizens who hold leadership roles in the community will be recruited to encourage broad public participation in the planning effort. They may disseminate information, conduct Meetings-in a Box (i.e., an exercise that allows people to contribute their views outside the boundaries of the Community Forum Series), post information on their websites and in their newsletters, and volunteer in other ways to further dialogue and encourage input. Community leaders may also be institutions like churches, neighborhood associations, and professional organizations.

► Volunteers

These are citizens, organizations, and businesses without any formal leadership role who nonetheless are willing to go beyond the role of participating and take on some kind of organizing role, whether it is hosting a Meeting-in-a-Box, organizing an educational event, hosting a contest, or volunteering to work at community events promoting the process. In addition to individuals, volunteers may also be places where Austin's communities gather, such as restaurants, cafés, and beauty shops.

► Institutional partners

Organizations—such as the independent school districts, Capital Metro, the State of Texas, area colleges and universities, counties, or the Lower Colorado River Authority—in Austin and the region that have authority over something related to the Comprehensive Plan will be engaged as partners throughout the process. These partnerships could include providing outreach and in-kind assistance through participation as technical stakeholders.

Comprehensive Plan Citizen Advisory Task Force

Members of the Comprehensive Plan Citizen Advisory Task Force will serve as champions, ambassadors, and guides for the process. The Task Force will provide a forum for the discussion of ideas and issues and help to guide the consultant team and staff in synthesizing public input. It will also, provide advice and recommendations to the City Council, the Planning Commission, City staff, and project consultant team.

Technical working groups

Later in the process, technical working groups will be established comprised of persons with special knowledge or interest in different plan elements. The technical working groups will help develop recommendations to the Task Force regarding how the Vision Statement and Plan Framework policy directions can be translated into specific strategies and actions. A process will be developed to ensure that the working group's recommendations are coordinated and integrated.

The Austin City Council

The City Council has final approval over the planning process and the new Austin Comprehensive Plan. Like the Comprehensive Plan Citizen Advisory Task Force and Planning Commission members they appoint, members of the City Council are advocates for a plan that captures the vision and spirit of Austin. In addition to hearings before the full City Council, the three-member Comprehensive Planning and Transportation Committee, which meets monthly, will be another venue for Council to stay up-to-date on the process.

Planning Commission

The Planning Commission is charged by the City Charter to recommend a Comprehensive Plan to City Council. Planning Commission initiated the current process by recommending that the City Council authorize a new Comprehensive Plan. It will also oversee the process to ensure that the Plan adheres to the Charter requirements and provides a long-range perspective on the future of Austin. Its five-member Comprehensive Plan Committee was active in preparing for a new Comprehensive Plan planning process. They are likely to meet monthly throughout the process and beyond to oversee its progress.

Other Boards and Commissions

As citizens already closely involved with city issues covered by the new Comprehensive Plan, members of Austin's other Boards and Commissions are valuable resources for this process. They are encouraged to attend all Comprehensive Plan events, but will become especially important as the process moves into the parts of Phase 2 and into Phase 3 and begins to deal with the plan elements. Many Boards and Commissions will be given an opportunity to formally review the draft Plan Framework and draft Comprehensive Plan.

City of Austin Staff

City staff will serve a number of functions, ranging from administration of the public process to data collection and analysis to facilitation at events. The Planning and Development Review Department manages the process with the consultant team. Other departments will provide staffing throughout the process, with their participation increasing as the process moves from Phase 2 (Plan Vision and Framework) to Phase 3 (development of the full Comprehensive Plan). Staff of the departments most directly associated with each element will work with technical and citizen working groups to develop the Comprehensive Plan document from the Plan Framework.

Consultant Team

The consultant team will work collaboratively with City staff to "orchestrate" the planning process and prepare substantive work products reflecting the results of public participation. The members of the consultant team are:

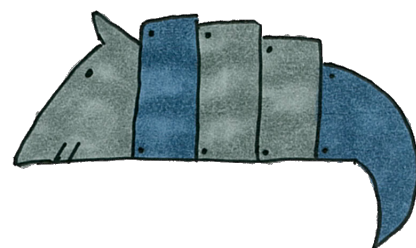
- **WRT (lead planning consultant):** land use and urban design, housing, environmental resources, public facilities and services, recreation and open space
- **AngelouEconomics:** economic development

- **Canales-Sondgeroth Associates:** local planning liaison/land use and implementation
- **Carter Design Associates:** community health and human services, related urban design issues
- **Criterion Planners:** sustainability modeling
- **Estilo Communications, Inc.:** public participation
- **Group Solutions RJW:** public participation
- **Kimley Horn and Associates, Inc.:** transportation
- **Raymond Chan Associates, Inc.:** utility infrastructure

Decision-Making

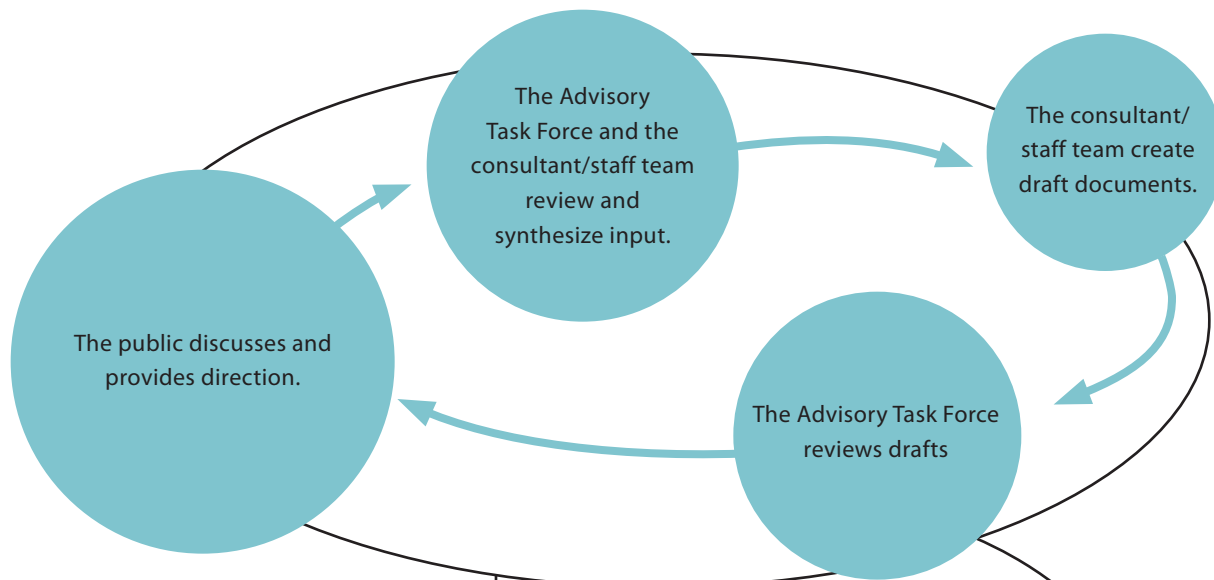
Articulating a vision for Austin's future will be a collaborative effort. While the ultimate decision-making power rests with City leadership, the collective voice of the community will guide decisions. It is with this in mind that the Public Participation Plan was designed as an iterative process, providing a variety of opportunities to elicit meaningful input from a diverse cross-section of Austin's citizenry. The overarching goal of the plan is to reasonably address the issues raised in that process and transcend personal and interest-based agendas to implement a common vision.

Before citizens can provide meaningful input on the Comprehensive Plan, they must first understand what the Comprehensive Plan is and learn about the variety of ways in which they can participate in its development. The Public Participation Plan addresses these needs through the following media outreach, education and discussion tools.

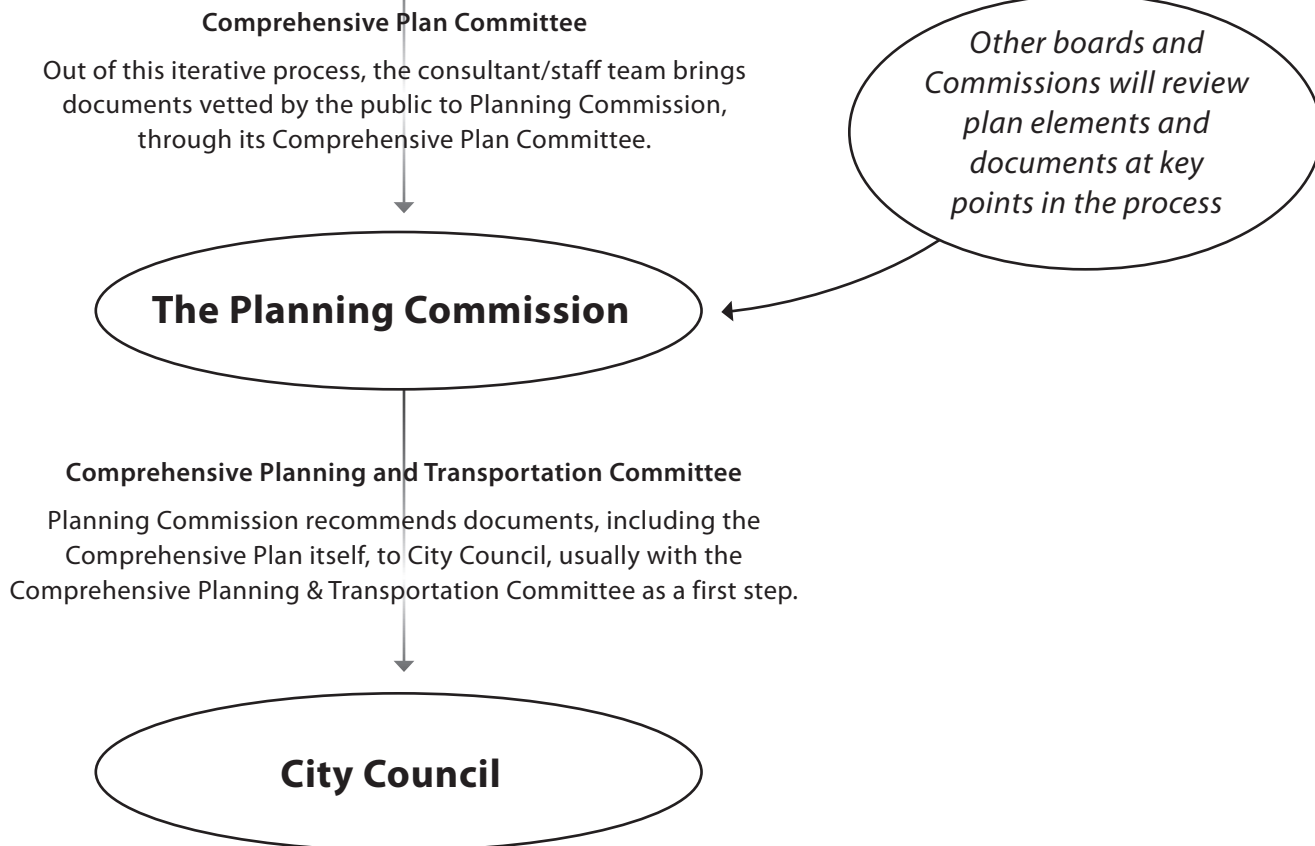


PUBLIC PROCESS

An iterative process between broad public input and review and the development of key plan documents, such as the Vision and Comprehensive Plan.



ADOPTION PROCESS



CHAPTER 3

MEDIA, EDUCATION, AND DISCUSSION TOOLS

CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

Outreach Message

Media Outreach

Educational and Outreach Events and Activities

Citizens may want to better understand what the Comprehensive Plan is, why it is important, and in what ways they can participate in its development. The information communicated in the outreach effort will answer these questions, and provide additional information for context. Outreach messages will vary with each phase of the planning process and will be shaped by the needs and desires of the public.

The table below outlines the outreach message(s) of each planning phase.

Table 1. Outreach Messages

- ▶ **Phase 1: Plan Kickoff**
 - What is a Comprehensive Plan?
 - Why should we care?
 - How can we get involved?
- ▶ **Phase 2: Forum Series #1**
 - What is a community vision?
 - The importance of a shared vision.
 - The role of the vision in shaping the rest of the plan.
- ▶ **Forum Series #2**
 - Understanding the growth Austin is facing and its implications.
 - Imagining alternative futures (scenarios).
- ▶ **Forum Series #3**
 - Implications of future scenarios.
 - Strategic directions for change.
- ▶ **Phase 3: Forum Series #4**
 - Elements of the Comprehensive Plan.
 - Priorities for Implementation.
- ▶ **Adopting the Plan**
 - The importance of the Comprehensive Plan.
 - Implementing the plan (e.g., policy changes, funding, spending priorities)

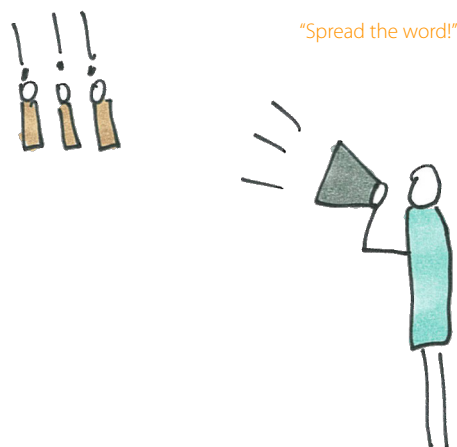
The Public Participation Plan will communicate the messages through the following media outreach, education and discussion tools.

Media Outreach

Recognizing the critical role the local media plays in informing residents about community issues, accurate and timely information will be provided to media representatives. Using the City's Public Information Office, regular news releases will be issued to newspapers and radio and television stations in the Austin area, including those targeting underrepresented populations. Press conferences, media interviews, and public service announcements will be used throughout the planning process to ensure the media thoroughly understands the project and can provide accurate information to the reading, viewing, and listening public.

Website

The project website will be a crucial resource for citizens involved in the process. It will be a resource library, an introduction to the plan and the process, and a record of the process. Citizens will also be able to receive project updates and meeting notices through the website.

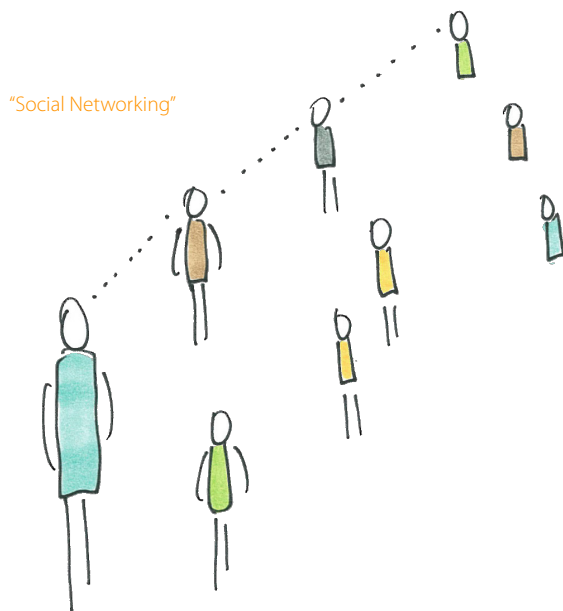


The site will also provide venues for discussion and comments, including live web chats. Note that many of these opportunities for discussion on the website will be distinct from formal opportunities for participation and input. Website opportunities are intended to encourage discussion and to spread information. Separate opportunities for direct input on the content of the plan will be available, tailored to the current stage of the process.

Video clips and photos will be posted to the website as they become available. Major updates will coincide with each phase of the planning process. Project newsletters, the results of web chats, a project calendar, and other guidance and reference materials will be posted. Once a brand and a name for the Comprehensive Plan have been selected, a distinct and easy-to-communicate URL will be acquired.

Social Networking

Leveraging social media has become a must-do in public outreach and can be both cost effective and time efficient. Content can be uploaded onto a variety of social media platforms (e.g., Facebook and Twitter) by utilizing auto posting on the project blog. Video clips, another compelling tool for community education, can be spread virally via sites like YouTube. Together, these social networking tools will help increase public understanding of the plan and the planning process.



Austin Public Libraries

The library system will serve a role similar to that of the website: a repository of documents throughout the process, as well as a center for information about the current state of the process. Librarians will be able to assist members of the public who are new to the process. Libraries may also host "talk to a planner" days to facilitate informal discussion between City staff and the public.



Speakers Bureau and Presentations

Requests for speakers and special presentations will be solicited throughout the project. Speakers bureau presentations target existing groups and organizations in settings of their choice. Examples of targeted groups include neighborhood groups, civic organizations, advocacy groups, City boards and commissions, parent-teacher organizations, business groups, special interest groups, etc. In order to maximize the number of speaking engagements, City staff, Citizen Advisory Task Force members and other community leaders will be recruited to serve on the Speakers Bureau. PowerPoint presentations, scripts, and comment forms will support speaker presentations.

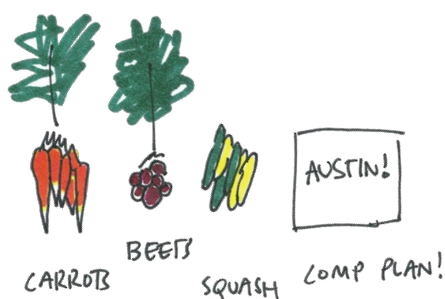
Newsletters, Updates and Fact Sheets

Project newsletters, updates, and fact sheets will be developed throughout the process to provide reliable information to the public. Newsletters will be produced at each phase of the project. Project updates and/or fact sheets will be prepared quarterly, or more frequently if new information, or circumstances, warrant. Newsletters, updates, and fact sheets will be posted to the project webpage. Links will also be forwarded electronically to the project's growing email database. The City may also elect to periodically include updates and flyers in utility bill inserts.

Engaging Activities

In addition to traditional routes to outreach and education, engaging events will be designed to complement each phase of the process. These activities should first and foremost be fun and interesting. They should also educate participants and reinforce the plan's participation principles. Examples include a citywide "get to know you" activity, a photo hunt, and self-guided tours of Austin.

"Buy your veggies and learn about the Plan"



Email Blasts

Email blasts are a cost-effective way to reach a large number of people quickly and with as much frequency as desired. They are, however, only as powerful as the database of addresses they target. The larger the reach of the database, the more effective an outreach tool email blasts are. The City has begun compiling an email database of individuals interested in knowing about, and participating in, the planning process. The project team will broadly communicate the desire to expand the list to include everyone interested in receiving information by this means. The project team will also forward email blasts to organizations for distribution to their members and constituents, along with requests that forwarded recipients go to the project website and join the project interest list.

Email blasts will generally be used no more than once a week and no less than once a month. They could include information such as meeting and event announcements, newsletters, process updates, and links to other planning documents.

Community Events

A staffed information booth placed at heavily attended community and public events, and at other locations with heavy foot traffic, can help reach the general public, as well as traditionally underrepresented populations. Targeting events and locations that appeal to and attract members of targeted populations provide the advantage of a physical presence in outreach, and helps generate familiarity, community and trust around the project. Examples of locations where informational booths may be set up are farmer's markets, ethnic events, and events held on campuses, housing authorities, churches, etc.

Brochures and Flyers

Basic outreach and information tools like brochures and flyers provide a hook for casual readers and can point those interested to more information. For the Comprehensive Plan, they will direct readers to the project website and/or public libraries for the opportunity to learn more. While the amount of information they can convey is limited, these materials are still important outreach tools because they are easy to distribute at meetings, public areas and community events.

Lectures and Discussion Events

These purely educational events may be sponsored by City partners (e.g., The University of Texas) or community organizations. To the extent possible, events such as lectures should be recorded and made available on the project website.

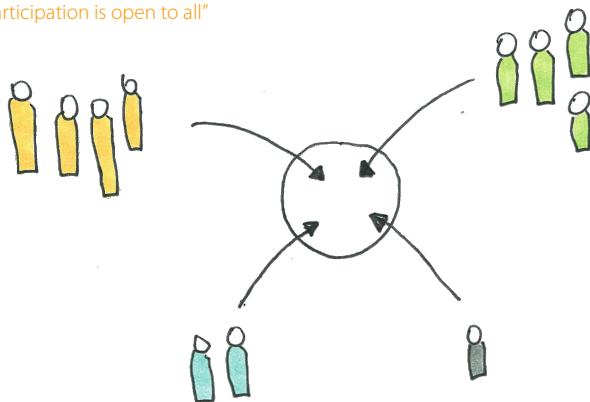
Book Club and Reading Lists

A list of books relevant to the planning process will be posted on the project website, in coordination with the Austin Public Library system. Throughout the process, existing book clubs will be encouraged to incorporate one or more of these titles into their groups.

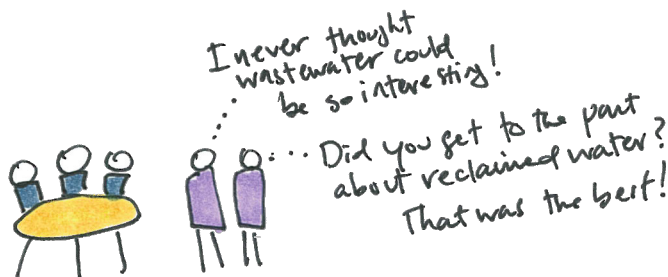
Meet-ups

In addition to community meetings hosted by existing organizations, ad hoc informal meet-ups will be encouraged at key points in the planning process. Reviewing document drafts in advance of formal discussions is one example of how these meet-ups might be used.

"Participation is open to all"



"Ad hoc meet-ups"



CHAPTER 4

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION TOOLS

CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

Public Participation
Events

Discussion Opportunities

Remote Opportunities

Once the citizens understand the planning process and how they can get involved, they are likely to be eager to provide their input. The Public Participation Plan is designed to elicit that input through a number of creative, engaging, accessible, and diverse public participation tools.

Community Forum Series

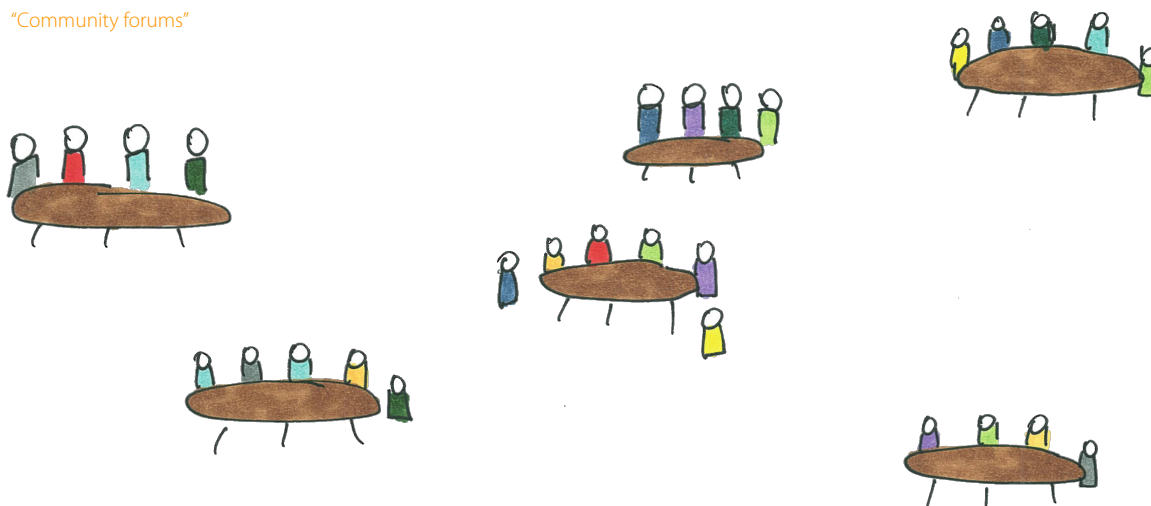
Community input will be primarily collected during four series of community-wide forums. These forums will be held at geographically dispersed locations around the city and ETJ. Each forum series will have a different objective and will consist of six public meetings, including mostly evening meetings and at least one daytime meeting held during the week. To the extent possible, at least some meetings will offer childcare and/or Spanish translation services for participants. Informational materials will indicate which forums will have these services available.

To make participation enjoyable for residents, the forums will offer engaging activities and light refreshments. Portions of the forums will be videotaped, and a brief video summary of each will be posted on the project website, along with the results.

**Web and Statistically Valid Survey**

A public opinion survey will be used to poll a statistically valid, random sample of Austinites. The resulting data will reveal general public opinion and substantiate, or amend, input gathered through other methods. The consultant will engage a research firm to provide expertise in developing and administering the survey. Results of this survey will be posted on the project web page. Concurrent with the statistically valid survey, there will be a self-selected version on the project website.

"Community forums"



Focus Groups

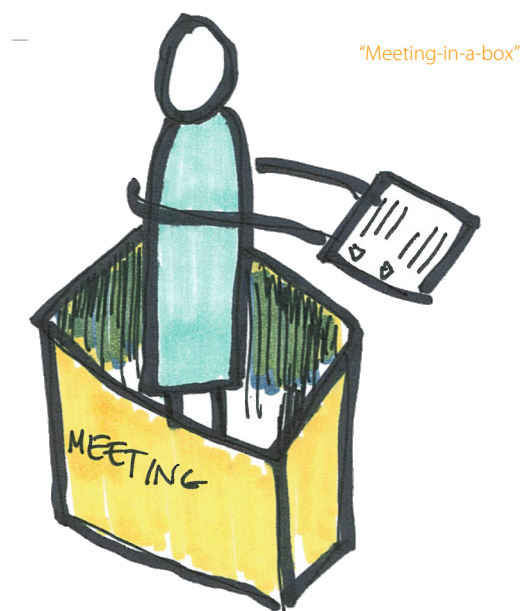
Citizens representing hard-to-reach or traditionally underrepresented groups may be recruited to take part in formal and/or informal focus groups. These discussions can provide rich, qualitative data that can help fill in the gaps left because other participation activities failed to adequately capture these viewpoints.

Draft Comments and Discussion Forums

An online comment form will provide an opportunity for “armchair” participants to lend their views on planning documents. The comment form will be posted on the project web page. Comment forms will be open for a defined time period (at least two weeks). In addition to soliciting feedback on draft documents from time to time, the website will host discussion forums aimed at soliciting input on the plan. This is distinct from other ongoing discussion forums that are primarily aimed at fostering general discussion or providing information.

Key Stakeholder Interviews

Interviews can provide the kind of rich data that bridges information gaps and offers invaluable insights to the planning team. These interviews will be conducted with opinion leaders and key project stakeholders. Elected officials, civic and business leaders, institutional partners, and subject matter experts are among those targeted for discussions.



Meetings-in-a-Box

A portable version of one of more of the community forums will be developed to use at small gatherings (equivalent to a table at a community forum). This “Meeting-in-a-Box” concept will allow volunteers to be trained as facilitators and conduct their own forums, capturing valuable public input that can be brought back to the planning team. The Meeting-in-a-Box will include background materials and tools for an interactive activity.

CHAPTER 5

KEY PUBLIC PARTICIPATION EVENTS

CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

Public Open House

Community Forum
Series #1 (Issues and
Aspirations)Community Forum
Series #2 (Considering
Alternative Futures)Community Forum
Series #3 (Selecting
a Preferred Future)Community Forum
Series #4 (Draft Plan
Review)

While public participation will be ongoing throughout development of the Comprehensive Plan, the process will include key events at which focused public input will be received to guide the next steps of the planning process. The process consists of three major phases:

- **Phase 1 (Plan Kickoff):** This phase—which is underway—will define how the Comprehensive Plan will be developed and initiate public outreach and input activities.
- **Phase 2 (Vision and Plan Framework):** This phase will evaluate existing conditions and trends, consider alternative scenarios for the future, and develop a vision and policy framework based on citizen input.
- **Phase 3 (The Comprehensive Plan):** This phase will develop the Vision and Plan Framework from Phase 2 into the complete Comprehensive Plan document, including the elements required by the Austin City Charter.

The first public participation opportunity took place on August 5, 2009. Other key public participation events include a **public open house** in Phase 1 and four **community forum series** (i.e., meetings held in different parts of the City)—three in Phase 2 and one in Phase 3.

The following provides an overview of each event and the anticipated products to be provided to the public. Key products will be made available in Spanish as well as English.

	Task	Public Input Opportunities	Work Product	Estimated Start
PHASE 1 Plan Kickoff Aug. - Oct. 2009	Designing the process	Participation Workshops (2)	Participation Plan	Aug. 2009
	Beginning the process	Public Open House	Flyers/information materials	Oct. 2009
	Beginning to engage the public	Speakers bureau, engaging events, community events	Project handout; Comprehensive Plan fact book	Oct. 2009
PHASE 2 Vision Nov. 2009 - Dec 2010	Articulating the vision	Community Forum Series #1: Brainstorming, strengths, challenges, ideas for the future	Common Ground Vision Statement (adopted by Council)	Nov. 2009
	Understanding the dynamics of change	Community Forum Series #2: Considering Alternative Futures (chip exercise)	Community Inventory Austin Today and Tomorrow Future Austin Scenarios	April 2010
	Plan Framework: Activating the vision	Community Forum #3: Selecting a Preferred Future	Scenario Evaluation/Preferred Scenario Draft Plan Framework Refined Plan Framework	July 2010
PHASE 3 Comprehensive Plan Document Jan. 2011 - Jun. 2012	Developing the plan document	Community Forum Series #4: Reviewing the Comprehensive Plan and setting priorities for implementation	Draft Comprehensive Plan; Final Comprehensive Plan	Oct. 2011
	Adopting the plan	Formal review by the City Council & Planning Commission		Jan. 2012

Public Participation Workshop

An initial public workshop was held at City Hall on August 5, 2009. Participants were asked for input on ways to engage the community in the planning process. That input helped develop this Public Participation Plan. The workshop kicked off a collaboration with the community that will weave its way throughout the entire planning process.

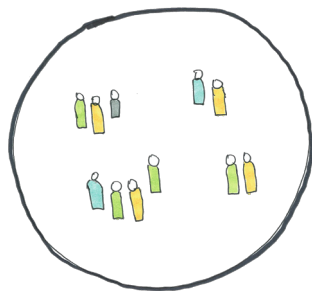
Public Open House

Conducted in a central location as part of the Plan Kickoff, the Public Open House will begin the planning process. Open House activities will introduce the comprehensive planning process to the public and provide an opportunity for citizens to begin to identify important issues for Austin's future ("issues scan"). The Open House will allow the public to meet the consultants and key city staff who will be involved in the comprehensive planning process. In addition to beginning to identify issues, members of the public will be able to provide input into selection of a "brand"/logo for the Comprehensive Plan. The Open House will also mark the launch of a web-based survey coordinated with the issues scan exercise.

Following the Open House, the consultant team will begin stakeholder and opinion leader interviews, structured similarly to the issues scan. The consultant team will also meet with the Citizens Advisory Task Force to orient them to their role in the process.

Following the Public Open House, the Speakers Bureau activities will begin. These presentations on the Comprehensive Plan will be made to interested groups across Austin. The project website will also launch after a brand has been determined and a URL has been acquired.

"Community engagement"



Primary products

1. Public Participation Plan (this document)
2. Flyers (half-page "pointers" to more information—e.g., on the project website)
3. Project handout (a full-page summary of the planning process)
4. Comprehensive Plan fact book (an introduction to the plan and a capsule summary of key Austin data)

Community Forum Series #1 (Issues and Aspirations): What do we want Austin to be in 10, 20, 25 years and beyond?

The first Community Forum Series will focus on identifying Austin's strengths, challenges, and components of a future vision for the City. Following an introductory presentation, meeting participants will separate into small groups and answer a series of questions. In addition to the scheduled community forum meetings, citizens will be provided the opportunity to provide input via "Meetings-in-a-Box," which will allow them to recreate the meeting activities in a portable format. Citizens interested in hosting a Meeting-in-a-Box will receive the Box and instructions; in exchange, they will ensure that a minimum number of people attend and provide the results of the meeting to the planning team.

A random, statistically valid survey will be conducted in coordination with Community Forum Series #1 and the Meetings-in-a-Box to receive representative input from residents who do not attend the meetings.

Primary products

1. Common Ground (a working paper organizing the results of Community Forum Series #1 into elements of a vision statement)
2. Vision Statement (to be adopted by Council)

Community Forum Series #2 (Considering Alternative Futures): What are we becoming?

The second Community Forum Series will provide an overview of current conditions and trends and their implications for a sustainable future using the sustainability measuring tool (INDEX software) developed by consultant team member Criterion Planners. Again working in small groups, participants will be asked to develop scenarios for Austin's future through a "chip exercise" (i.e., placing units representing projected increments of growth on a map of the City and its ETJ in the configuration they feel best meets their aspirations for the future). Representative visualizations of the chips in different contexts (e.g., what different densities look like and how much space they take up) will be provided. Follow-up discussions, such as online forums, will complement the chip exercise.

Primary products

1. Community Inventory (current conditions and trends)
2. Austin Today and Tomorrow (an assessment of current and future conditions if current trends continue)
3. Future Austin Scenarios (2–3 alternative scenarios synthesized from the chip exercise results)

Community Forum Series #3 (Selecting a Preferred Future): What changes in direction are needed?

Community Forum Series #3 will present and evaluate the alternative scenarios developed from the results of Series #2, again using Criterion Planners' INDEX software. A "scoring" exercise will allow participants to select a preferred scenario for the future, which may incorporate components of more than one alternative. Participants will also be asked to identify key changes in direction represented by the preferred scenario. The results will be used to craft a Draft Plan Framework that sets policy

directions for achieving the Vision and preferred scenario, integrated across the different plan elements (land use, transportation, conservation and environmental resources, economic development, etc.). The public will have the opportunity to provide feedback on the Draft Plan Framework through various means.

Primary products

1. Scenario Evaluation / Preferred Scenario
2. Draft Plan Framework
3. Refined Plan Framework

Community Forum Series #4 (Draft Plan Review): What actions should be taken to achieve the sustainable Austin of the future?

Workshops involving citizens with special technical expertise or interest in particular subjects will be conducted to develop action-oriented recommendations for different elements of the Comprehensive Plan. City staff and the consultant team will work with the Citizens Advisory Task Force and Planning Commission to incorporate these recommendations into a complete Draft Comprehensive Plan, including the Vision Statement, Plan Framework, Plan Elements, and Implementation. When the draft plan is completed, Community Forum Series #4—which like the previous series will include meetings and complementary venues for input—will provide an engaging way for participants to review the plan, with a focus on identifying priorities for implementation.

Primary products

1. Draft Comprehensive Plan
2. Community Forum Series #4 Results
3. Final Draft Comprehensive Plan for Adoption

CHAPTER 6

TRANSPARENCY AND DOCUMENTATION

CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

Formal Documents

Working Documents

Materials for Media
and Public Outreach/
Participation

Project Journal

In order to establish and maintain the public's trust during this collaborative planning process, City staff and consultants will keep accurate records as the project unfolds. The resulting transparency will serve as a living contract between the City of Austin and its constituents and will provide an historical timeline for the project. Following is a list of items important to maintaining a transparent record of the planning process. It will continue to grow and evolve throughout the lifecycle of the project.

Formal Documents

Documents made available for public review include the Public Participation Plan, minutes from meetings (i.e., Comprehensive Plan Citizens Advisory Task Force), summary reports from all of the Community Forum Series, survey results, transcripts and a summary of web chats online, and written comments. Formal documents will be written in plain English, with as little jargon and as few acronyms as possible. When technical terms and acronyms are used, they should be clearly defined and used consistently across formal documents.

Working Documents

These documents are intended as stepping stones toward the formal documents. Working documents are more likely to include unexplained jargon or acronyms, even while they attempt to develop the plain language that will be used in formal documents. Because of their nature, they are more likely to be difficult for lay persons, other than dedicated participants, to navigate.

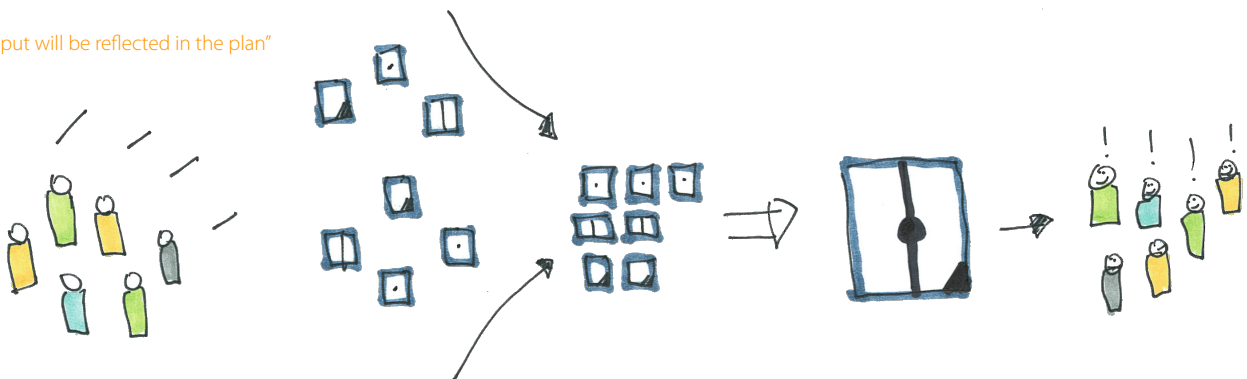
Materials for Media and
Public Outreach/Participation

Materials used for media and public outreach will also be available to the public. These include news releases, media kits, other promotional print materials, and the PowerPoint presentation used in community forums and Meetings-in-a-Box.

Project Journal

One of the challenges of a large process like this one is that participants will drift in and out over time, and even citizens who are involved throughout can easily lose their bearings as new topics arise. As the process begins, a "Project Journal" will be developed, with two goals. First, it should give a sense of how the process moves back and forth between public input and planning team synthesis of that input, to ensure a transparent process. Second, it should give a sense of the public spirit at each step in the process, so as to respect the input given at each step. The journal should tell the story of the creation of the Comprehensive Plan.

"Input will be reflected in the plan"



CHAPTER 7

MONITORING AND FEEDBACK

Built into the public participation planning process are a variety of mechanisms to monitor the efficacy of outreach and participation tools. Feedback from these mechanisms can be used to alter methods as necessary to bridge gaps, ensure meaningful input, and maximize reach and diversity. The modular design of the Participation Plan allows for the flexibility to adapt to feedback and refine methods to elicit more salient results. Monitoring and feedback mechanisms include:

- Feedback from the Comprehensive Plan Citizen Advisory Task Force
- Feedback from partners
- Evaluation forms collected at all public events
- Media coverage
- Team self-evaluation

"Success"



