



Neighborhood Planning Division Public Engagement Standards September 2009

The Office of Planning (OP) values public involvement in the development of all plans completed by the agency in order to ensure that plans reflect the desires and aspirations of the people and neighborhoods of Washington, DC. In order to ensure consistency and predictability of public engagement during the planning process, OP has drafted the following guidelines for public engagement.

Public engagement standards will guide public notification policies, broad communication strategies, provisions for open discussion and consideration of and response to public comments. These standards should be interpreted as the foundation for public outreach and engagement in the planning process; however the circumstances, preferences, and unique characteristics of each neighborhood may warrant different strategies and approaches to public engagement. To account for this, the Project Manager for each plan/project will create a Public Participation Plan (“PPP”). The PPP will include basic requirements and additional strategies designed to respond to local needs for the plan/project.

The following document provides the basic standards for Public Participation Plans, public outreach, public engagement, draft plan review and public comment period.

1.0 Public Participation Plan (PPP)

The main goal of a PPP is to develop a customized strategy for public communication, engagement, and participation in a planning process. Taken individually, the activities described in a PPP are not expected to reach and inform each and every resident of the city or a given neighborhood. Collectively, however, strategies are designed to effectively and efficiently provide a broad-based dissemination of information and maximize the opportunity for citizen involvement and comment.

The majority of public participation strategies will focus on public information, education and input and will generally occur through a series of public meetings. Such meetings provide opportunities for the public to openly discuss planning issues with local decision makers, city staff, and any hired planning consultants. Other public participation activities will be explored to inform and receive input from residents that may not be able to attend these public meetings and hearings. The PPP will define specific strategies that respond to the unique needs of the study area.



Requirements for PPPs:

- Prior to the commencement of a small area plan or planning project, the project manager will develop a Public Participation Plan (PPP).
- The PPP will include the following elements at a minimum:
 - *Stakeholder information*
 - *Language access needs and strategy*
 - *Preferred public outreach methods and public engagement methods that meet or the standards defined below*
 - *Public meeting schedule*
- The PPP shall be updated as needed by the project manager so that it is responsive to community needs identified during the planning process.

2.0 Public Outreach

The public outreach and communication strategy developed through the PPP shall guide the Office of Planning's activities for the duration of the planning process. The following requirements will be incorporated into every PPP:

- Impacted Advisory Neighborhood Commissions (ANC) and individual Single Member District (SMD) Commissioners within the study area will receive electronic and hard copy notices of all public meetings held on the plan/project. OP will use the addresses for ANCs and SMD on file with the Office of Advisory Neighborhood Commissions. Notices shall be sent at least 10 business days in advance of the meeting unless scheduling or other circumstances prevent it.
- The Advisory Committee established for each plan (See section 3.0 below) will receive electronic and hard copy notices of all public meetings held on the plan/project. Notices will be sent at least 10 business days in advance of the meeting unless scheduling or other circumstances prevent it.
- An electronic or a hard copy notice shall be sent to past meeting attendees who registered on OP meeting sign-in sheets and provided legible contact information. Notices will be sent at least 14 days in advance of the meeting unless scheduling or other circumstances prevent it. The decision to utilize electronic or hard copy notices will be determined for each plan/project.
- OP will request that information regarding public meetings be posted to the District web calendar and the OP web calendar.
- OP will forward information regarding public meetings to impacted Ward Councilmember offices for distribution among constituents.

The following outreach methods are highly encouraged for inclusion in each PPP:

- Distribution of electronic or hard copy notice to active civic, citizen, and neighborhood groups within the plan study area identified in the PPP.
- Distribute meeting notice/flyers to churches, local businesses, community-based organizations, schools, and other public facilities in the project area
- As appropriate, request the assistance of community liaison agencies for the government, such as the Mayor's Office on Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs (OAPIA) and the Mayor's Office on Latino Affairs (OLA), to forward notifications by way of their community and residential contacts/list servs.

3.0 Public Engagement

Through the PPPs, OP will design a public engagement strategy for each plan/project that may include establishing an advisory committee, holding advisory committee meetings, holding public meetings, and

utilizing alternative mechanisms for public input. The following guidelines and requirements apply to each of these public engagement tools:

Advisory Committees

Direct input from community leaders and other stakeholders is a critical component of any successful plan/project. The purpose of an Advisory Committee is to communicate neighborhood priorities, guide the Office of Planning on developing recommendations, assist in public outreach, and play an active role in the planning process. Through the PPP, OP will identify impacted stakeholder groups to be invited to participate in the Advisory Committee, including Advisory Neighborhood Commissions (ANC), Single Member District Commissioners, citizen/civic/neighborhood associations, business organizations, institutions, and tenants/condo associations. OP also requests input from the impacted Ward Councilmember offices on groups or individuals that should be included on the committee. OP recognizes that the initial Advisory Committee may need to change composition over the course of the planning process in order to incorporate new or emerging stakeholder groups.

Requirements for Advisory Committee Meetings:

- Advisory Committee meetings shall be held around public workshops, either before to get input on content/approach, or after to synthesize results. Meetings shall be held during each of the planning phases: pre-planning, visioning, goal setting, recommendations development, and draft plan.
- If deemed appropriate by OP, materials may be circulated in advance of the meeting for review.
- Following the meeting, materials, including presentations, handouts and meeting notes, will be made available to Advisory Committee members and members of the public via the OP website.

Public Meetings

Public meetings are an essential component to sharing information, receiving input, and making decisions through a planning process. The format of a public meeting varies depending on the meeting objective, available resources, and scheduling considerations. Recognizing that members of the public may not always have the opportunity to attend a public meeting, each PPP will identify alternative mechanisms for obtaining input such as, surveys, website tools, focus groups, small group briefings.

Requirements for Public Meetings:

- Public meetings/workshops. At least one public meeting should be held during each of the planning phases: 1) visioning/goal setting, 2) recommendations development, and 3) draft plan.
- Prior to scheduling the meeting, OP shall review the DC City Calendar, ANC meeting calendars, and local citizen/civic association calendars to attempt to avoid meeting conflicts. Every effort will be made to avoid direct conflicts; however, facility availability, staffing, and scheduling issues may make some conflicts unavoidable.
- OP will attempt to identify a meeting location that is central to the project area, accessible by mass transit, and to the greatest extent possible, select a facility that is easily accessible to the elderly and other special needs populations. In some study areas there may not be a facility that is suitable or that can accommodate a public meeting; in these situations, OP will work with the Advisory Committee to identify a preferred meeting location.
- OP will provide a sign in sheet for participants in order to track meeting participation and build a contact information database of participants.
- OP will post a meeting summary on the agency website within 7 business days of the public meeting. The meeting summary form includes a synopsis of the public meeting, outcomes, and next steps.

ANC Engagement

OP recognizes the importance of engaging and interacting with the impacted Advisory Neighborhood Commission throughout the planning process. To facilitate communication and coordination, the ANC as a whole and all individual Single Member District Commissioners within the study area will be invited to participate on the Advisory Committee. Recognizing the time demands associated with ANC obligations, OP is happy to work with the chair of the ANC and impacted SMDs to determine what level of engagement the Commission would like to have in the Advisory Committee and general public process.

Requirements for ANC Engagement:

- Depending upon the project and the preferences of the impacted ANC, the project manager should offer full commission or SMD briefings at each phase of the planning process: 1) visioning/goal setting, 2) recommendations development, and 3) draft plan.
- OP staff will be available upon request to brief ANC commissioners on the plan/project.
- All noticing and invitation requirements referenced in sections 1, 2, 3 apply.

4.0 Draft Plan Release and Public Comment Period

For Small Area Plans that will be submitted to the DC Council for approval, there are specific requirements that govern the release of the draft plan for public review and comment. The length of the public comment period is a minimum of 30 calendar days. OP may elect to have a longer comment period to account for holidays or may elect to extend the public comment period after the release of the draft plan to allow for additional time for review. During the comment period, members of the public can submit written comments on the draft plan. OP utilizes a comment form which can be submitted by mail, fax, or completed online. OP will also accept written comments in other formats, but prefers that the public use the comment form so that comments and recommendations are clearly discernable.

OP will also conduct a mayoral public hearing on the draft plan which may be scheduled after the 30th day of the comment period. The date, time, and location of the mayoral public hearing are contained in the public notice. The purpose of the mayoral public hearing is to obtain oral comments on the draft plan. Witnesses are encouraged to register with OP in advance of the hearing.

Requirements for the Release of the Draft Plan:

- A public notice in the DC Register will be published announcing the release of the draft plan, the start of public comment period and the intent to hold a mayoral public hearing. The notice will include the following:
 - start and end date of the public comment period
 - date, time, and location of the mayoral public hearing
 - public sites where the plan can be reviewed
 - instructions for submitting written comments
 - instructions for signing up to testify at the hearing in advance
 - project manager's contact information
- The notice will be published in the DC Register at least 30 days prior to the date set for the mayoral public hearing
- A hard copy of the published notice shall be sent to the impacted Ward Councilmember office, impacted Advisory Neighborhood Commission, impacted Single Member District Commissioners, and the plan's Advisory Committee.
- A copy of the notice will be posted on the OP website.

- Color copies of the plan will be made available at public sites in the study area as stated in the public notice. A copy of the plan will be available at the Office of Planning and the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Library.
- Any changes made to the public comment period length, mayoral public hearing details, or public locations of the draft plan will be announced in a revised DC Register notice.

Mayoral Public Hearing Requirements:

- The hearing will be run by the Director of the Office of Planning or his/her designee.
- OP, at its discretion, may provide a brief presentation or oral overview of the planning process and major goals of the plan prior to the commencement of the hearing.
- Citizens who have registered in advance of the hearing to provide testimony will be allowed to testify first. Other witnesses must sign in prior to the hearing and will be called in order.
- The hearing shall be transcribed and all witnesses must provide their name and address for the record.
- Witnesses will be allowed three minutes to provide testimony and should provide a written copy of their testimony to the Office of Planning at the time of the hearing.
- A copy of the hearing transcript will be posted on the OP website following the hearing and submitted to the Council as part of the legislative package that accompanies the final plan and approval resolution.
- After closing the hearing, OP may elect to respond to public comments, questions, or concerns.

Consideration of and Response to Public Comments:

Following the close of the public comment period and the conclusion of the mayoral public hearing, OP staff will review all of the input received and consider changes to the draft plan. A log of all comments received and the agency's response will be posted to the OP website and submitted to the Council as part of the legislative package that accompanies the final plan and approval resolution. An executive summary of all changes made to the draft plan will also be included in the legislative package that is submitted to Council. Citizens should note that once a Small Area Plan is finalized and submitted to the Council for review and approval, no further changes can be made to the Plan since it is approved by resolution of the Council.