

FRAMEWORK FOR PLANNING COMMISSION IMPROVEMENTS AND ACTIONS

Summary of OPC Discussion Groups June 21, 2014 Retreat

This framework provides objectives and actions for:

1. Communication within the Planning Commission
2. Communication with the Community
3. Communication with Staff
4. Planning Commission Work Plan and Annual Retreat

COMMUNICATION WITHIN THE PLANNING COMMISSION

Themes from Commissioner Comments:

Good communication builds trust

We should use each other as a resource

Involve all - welcome diverse opinions

Provide time at end of meetings for questions/issues/comments

*Establish process for bringing in new information and unique perspectives
Incorporate new ideas or recommendations into subsequent agendas*

Meetings are too constrained to get to know one another

Need a forum to speak to each other freely

Need for clear understanding of how and when we can communicate with each other, what are the boundaries?

Objectives

- Enrich Planning Commission dialogue and recommendations by ensuring that all Commissioners points of view are received and heard.
- Enhance discourse, engage all members, build relationships and strengthen trust within Planning Commission.
- Provide Commissioners the opportunity to request a new issue or discussion item be added to the current or subsequent agendas.

- Mutual understanding of communication rules, challenges and constraints.
- Collective value of transparent, honest and respectful communication.
- Assure a supportive and safe environment to express ideas, opinions and concerns.
- Assume inquiries and comments are expressed with best intentions.
- Listen to find commonality in viewpoints, and respect differences of opinion.
- Commitment to teamwork and the integrity of the Planning Commission.

ACTIONS TO IMPROVE COMMUNICATION WITHIN THE PLANNING COMMISSION

1. The Planning Commission Chair will ensure that all planning commissioners have the opportunity to express their opinion and articulate views and concerns.
2. Planning Commission Agenda's will include a segment for Planning Commission comments prior to adjournment, assuring adequate time for all members to provide comments.
3. The Chair of the Planning Commission will request comments from members on agenda items for upcoming meetings and any other concerns or perspectives on issues other than those that have already been addressed during the course of the meeting.
4. Encourage dialogue during meetings, ask for additional opinions; involve those who haven't spoken on the issue.
5. Report on attendance and participation in City Council meetings and other community meetings as part of regular agenda.
6. Plan and manage meetings to assure adequate time for dialogue among members.
7. New member orientations will include information about how and why the public sector operates regarding communication (e.g., all emails subject to disclosure.)
8. Planning Commission training on the Open Meetings Act and communication rules regarding the role of a Planning Commissioner, conflict of interest, constraints, considerations and opportunities. (Possibly a set of general written guidelines, or opportunity for Q&A with the Deputy City Attorney?).
9. Provide work sessions for in-depth review and discussion of specific issues. This may involve consultants, additional city staff and community members.

COMMUNICATION WITH THE COMMUNITY

Themes from Commissioner Comments:

Improve how community involvement is conducted.

Our challenge is to make planning exciting. Find ways to communicate issues and relate them to the public at an emotional level, e.g., examples, illustrations, involving experts such as the Density Presentation, using visuals rather than numbers, e.g., heights.

Develop public involvement processes that are proactive and timely. Involve people early (e.g., reach out and attend neighborhood, WOBA, businesses and other groups).

Community engagement should be systematic and timely to effectively influence decision making.

Community includes more than those who attend Commission meetings. There's an invisible public who have opinions, interests and ideas. How to engage them?

What are the modes and purposes of community involvement?

How can the Planning Commission influence community involvement?

What role should the Planning Commission have in community involvement?

Improve the Public Notice format and distribution.

Objectives

- Communication with the community will be open, transparent, consistent and timely.
- Improve the quality of communication with the community.
- Ensure high quality and diverse community involvement.
- Ensure that outreach to the community is pro-active, in time to influence decisions.
- Become informed of the spectrum of purposes and methods for engaging the community.
- Communicate issues in a creative and interactive manner.
- Engage the community to achieve high quality, environmentally sustainable growth and economic development.
- Improve how the public is informed of projects, meetings and decision-making processes.

ACTIONS TO IMPROVE COMMUNICATION WITH THE COMMUNITY

1. As part of developing the annual Work Plan, determine the level of public participation needed to support the Commission in effectively engaging with the public on each item. .
2. Determine the role of Planning Commission in city community engagement activities; this may differ with the project and purpose for involving the community or stakeholders.
3. Participate in public engagement training to provide a common understanding of terminology, methods and purpose.
4. Sponsor experts to present community development examples, ideas, options and impacts in a creative, compelling and interactive format with the community.
5. Establish a liaison to the Coalition of Neighborhood Associations.
6. Continue engagement with existing groups and organizations. Invite newer Commissioners to attend community meetings when possible.
7. Team with staff to improve the Public Notice format, language, distribution and notification.

COMMUNICATION WITH STAFF

Themes from Commissioner Comments:

Staff are excellent, responsive and thorough.

Satisfied, delighted, impressed with OPC staff and all City staff responses to information requests.

Staff input and recommendations are welcome, OPC needs professional advice from staff.

The Planning Commission would benefit from additional involvement with cross- departmental staff.

It is beneficial to share perspectives with additional City Advisory Committees.

Transmittal of information and meetings packets does not always provide enough time for review and preparation.

Format and organization of staff reports can be improved to enhance efficiency of review.

Objectives

- Respectful, timely, thoughtful and effective communication with staff.
- Responsive, appropriate, objective and thorough information from staff.
- Timely transmittal of meeting materials for Commissioners and public review.

- Professional and informed perspectives and guidance from staff.
- Collaboration with cross departmental staff and city advisory committees.
- Teamwork to achieve Planning Commission goals and objectives.

ACTIONS TO IMPROVE COMMUNICATION WITH PLANNING COMMISSION AND STAFF

1. Communicate with staff in a respectful and professional manner.
2. When requesting additional information from staff be considerate of time and resource constraints. Staff may respond to an individual's information request if it will take one hour or less. A more substantial request for information requires a motion by the full Commission and must pertain to an approved work item.
3. Prioritize information and direction from City Council in staff reports.
4. Encourage staff to provide their professional opinions.
5. Anticipate when involvement of additional department staff or advisory committee members will enhance the quality of Planning Commission evaluation and discussion.
 - a. Provide enough time for staff to coordinate their participation.
 - b. Consider need for additional city staff and advisory committee coordination during work plan development.
6. Discuss organization of staff reports, develop recommendations for improvements and coordinate implementation with staff.
7. Strive to mail packets by Tuesday before the meeting to assure that paper packets arrive by Friday. However, if a packet is incomplete on Tuesday it may be mailed as late as Thursday before the meeting.
8. Staff will provide information about City happenings during Announcements, and is available to answer questions during Information Requests, at each meeting

PLANNING COMMISSION WORK PLAN AND ANNUAL RETREAT

Themes from Commissioner Comments:

The Planning Commission needs more information and involvement in annual work plan.

Prioritization of Planning Commission issues and agenda's would result in better use of OPC time.

Pro-active engagement of community requires more involvement with and understanding of work plan.

The Planning Commission would benefit from annual and semi-annual retreats to develop work plans and prepare for major planning issues and projects.

Retreats provide opportunity for orientation of new Commissioners, develop annual work plan, establish priorities, and to get to know one another and staff.

Objectives

- The Planning Commission will continue to participate in the development of their annual work plan recommendation to the City Council.
- Annual retreats provide opportunity to prepare annual work plan, establish priorities, learn about significant and complex issues, orient new members, develop relationships, and inspire Commissioners with opportunities to influence the quality of their community.

ACTIONS TO IMPROVE PLANNING COMMISSION ANNUAL WORK PLAN

1. Use annual retreats as an opportunity for in-depth discussion, dialogue, teambuilding, problem solving, orienting and strategic thinking about specific issues and the city's future.
2. Review the City Council Work Plan and Priorities to inform the Commission's Work Plan.
3. Develop framework for defining major and not so major issues for OPC.
4. Consider resources that will help OPC enhance community interest and involvement in Commission discussions, deliberation and decision-making.
5. Plan for quarterly study sessions to provide opportunity for in-depth evaluation and discussion and dialogue with experts and the community.