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ATTACHMENT 2

## Public Involvement\*

### Potential Comprehensive Plan Policy - Discussion

\* Public administration literature often distinguishes terms such as “participation,” “involvement,” and “engagement.” For purposes of this paper, these terms are used interchangeably, referring generally to the City engaging citizens and citizens getting involved in civic affairs.

#### Introduction

The City of Olympia’s Comprehensive Plan aims to create the sustainable community and quality of life that citizens value and imagine for the future. The Plan update will emphasize that individual citizens, other agencies and groups share responsibility with the City for fulfilling the community’s vision and goals. While the City has always stressed the importance of public involvement, efforts could probably be improved. Updating the public involvement goals and policies in the Comprehensive Plan will establish a foundation for success.

#### Origin of Question

The City Council approved scope of the update includes, “revise the public involvement chapter; especially with respect to use of new technology to inform and receive input from the public.” This element of the scope is vague and staff has heard a range expectations. Staff would like input from the Planning Commission about how the existing public involvement goal and policies may be appropriately updated.

*Public comment from Phase 1 regarding the topic of public involvement is Attachment A. Also, the focus meeting final report is at [www.imagineolympia.com](http://www.imagineolympia.com) (with a direct link in References.)*

#### Question(s)

1. The existing public involvement goal states, “To establish and maintain City decision processes that include the informed, active participation of all those affected.” The emphasis is on citizens being involved in “decision making processes.” Is this still the extent of public involvement goal(s)?

2. Review existing public involvement policies (Attachment B) along with options outlined in this report. What new policies, if any, do you think should be included in the update?

## Regulatory Framework

Olympia has a council-manager form of government. The city council is the legislative body and members are elected to represent the public. The city council has powers to conduct the affairs of the city as allowed under the Washington State Constitution, [RCW Chapter 35A](#), and the [Olympia Municipal Code](#). Citizen involvement occurs along with the work of the council, and certain rules establish minimum requirements for public involvement.

The Growth Management Act (GMA) requires each city planning under the Act to “establish procedures for early and continuous public participation in the development and amendment of comprehensive land use plans and development regulations implementing such plans.” [WAC 365-196-600](#) lists specific requirements, including ‘effective’ notice, opportunity for written comment, at least one public hearing, and recording of the process.

The [Open Public Meetings Act](#) requires that whenever a majority of the city council or an advisory committee meet to discuss city business, the meeting be noticed, open and accessible to the public (except when it can be considered an executive session). Rules, regulations, ordinances, resolutions, orders and directives must be adopted at open public meetings.

The [Public Records Act](#) allows the public full access to information regarding how state and local governments are run. The Act requires the City to make most public records available upon request, including papers, photos, maps, videos and electronic records. Posts to social networking websites such as blogs, wikis, facebook, or twitter made or received in connection with city business (such as advice or receiving comments about the agency, its programs, core business, etc.) are also considered public records and must be retained.

The [Olympia Municipal Code](#) requires certain opportunities for public involvement related to various types of actions; for example Title 18 describes public notice, meeting and comment requirements for land use actions. Some City programs or projects that are funded by grant money may have additional public involvement requirements.

These are some of the rules and regulations establish the minimum requirements for public involvement.

## Existing Conditions

The City of Olympia has long recognized the value of public involvement. Traditionally, the City has emphasized [advisory boards](#), which provide an opportunity for citizens to get involved at a high level to influence city decisions and activities. The City also emphasizes [neighborhood programs](#), which offer education and other opportunities to influence neighborhood life. Other steps the City has taken to implement public involvement policies are outlined in Attachment C.

Despite these efforts, we heard through the Comprehensive Plan update and other outreach citizens are frustrated by a perceived as a lack of opportunities to meaningfully participate, be heard and influence city actions. In line with national trends, citizens are not satisfied with traditional forms of involvement that offer one-way exchanges of information. They want the City to be more creative in its efforts and desire greater influence over decisions. At the focus meetings, we heard citizens want more power to determine how neighborhoods will develop.

The business of the City includes many different types of actions that have varying legal requirements and levels of significance. Sometimes we offer engagement activities that are creative and go beyond the minimum requirements; we won the 2010 Governor Smart Growth Award for public involvement in [Imagine Olympia](#). Sometimes we would like to offer a certain type of engagement activity, but are constrained by resources or law. For example, we have been cautious about using social media sites since posts to these sites are considered public records under the law, yet may be difficult to retain. (We are currently developing a social media policy that will guide departments on how to use sites and comply with public records law.) There are also times when it is safe to say we could do better with public engagement.

The International Association for Public Participation (iap2) has developed a Spectrum of Public Participation (Attachment D). The Spectrum outlines citizen participation approaches along a continuum, ranging from one-way communication to empowering citizens to make decisions. The City may use any of these iap2 approaches depending on the action being taken. For example, the City strives to 'empower' citizens by providing education and technical assistance through environmental stewardship programs such as [Water Wise](#). Citizen involvement in land use activities tends to fall within the 'inform' and 'consult' category.

Land use issues can be particularly frustrating for citizens. Citizens tend to get involved when there is a project in their neighborhood they object to, and become frustrated over a limited ability to influence decisions at this stage. Generally, as long as the project meets zoning and other regulations, the land use permit may be approved; the City needs a legal reason to deny a permit. Simply put, land use laws do not empower citizens to make land use permit decisions. However, it is possible to improve citizen engagement in land use in other ways. One of the

best ways for citizens to influence what gets built in their neighborhood is to get involved in the crafting of zoning and other development regulations. Using innovative engagement methods at that time along with better education about the land use process could go a long way.

We should explore how to improve our public involvement efforts at the implementation stage. At this stage in the update, we need to look at existing public involvement goal and policies to determine if we have the right foundation in place (Attachment B).

## **Best Practices**

Local governments are increasingly moving away from typical types of involvement (i.e., public hearings) and finding innovative ways to foster civic culture. It's part of growing international trends toward open government, sustainability, democratic governance and civic engagement. Some 'best practice' principles that may be useful when considering policy are included below:

### **Open Government Initiative:**

In 2009, President Obama launched an Open Government Initiative to increase openness and trust in government by directing federal agencies to do three things:

1. Make their data more transparent.
2. Engage the public in meaningful ways.
3. Increase the use of the collaboration as a way to get things done.

The Open Government Initiative also focuses on creating an organizational culture that supports openness and innovation toward good public participation. This includes training and professional development, new units and positions, policies and systems for responding to public input, standards, evaluation and measures of success.

### **National League of Cities - Priorities for Democratic Governance:**

1. Inform citizens about public issues and about their rights and responsibilities.
2. Build a stronger sense of community, connectedness and attachment to place.
3. Reduce tensions around controversial issues and between different groups of people.
4. Tap into the power of citizens to help solve public problems.
5. Help local government develop smarter, more broadly supported public policies and services.
6. Give marginalized people a place at the table.

## **Connected Communities - Guiding Principles for Choosing Citizen Engagement Tools:**

1. There is no single way to promote citizen engagement or a single stage in the governmental process when it occurs.
2. Citizen engagement must involve actual engagement rather than simply an exchange of information.
3. The basic test of engagement is whether citizens have the opportunity to discuss ideas or efforts with other citizens and officials to better understand each other.
4. Engagement activities should ‘meet people where they are.’ Address issues that people perceive to be important, and move beyond traditional methods and values.
5. Consider giving citizens a significant role in making major policy choices. Be transparent about the role citizens will play in decision-making.
6. Consider whether decision makers are willing to listen and take into account the result of citizen engagements processes in decision making.

## **Cities as Sustainable Ecosystems - Strategies for Empowerment\* and Participation:**

*\*In this context, empowerment means “developing people’s confidence to participate, especially marginalized groups such as women, indigenous people, the poor, disabled, and the illiterate. It means giving people the tools to participate in decision-making processes and developing processes that respect different ways of being in the world. Empowerment is about giving a voice to all people and fostering involvement in civic life (Newman and Jennings, p. 156).”*

Cities should:

1. Commit to empowerment and participation.
2. Empower people through education and healing (building relationships of trust).
3. Use different levels of engagement for different urban functions.
4. Engage the most disempowered.
5. Develop a resource base (set of techniques).

## **Options & Analysis**

The Comprehensive Plan is more than just a document to comply with GMA; the City embraces it as fundamental to creating and maintaining the sustainable community and quality of life citizens value and imagine for the future. The City, individual citizens, other agencies and groups all share responsibility for fulfilling the community vision and goals. Therefore, how the City engages citizens and how citizens get involved in civic affairs is extremely important.

At this stage, we need to develop clear policies that establish a foundation for meaningful and effective public involvement. Policies should also be broad to encompass the full range of City activities and levels of engagement. In the Plan update, goals will be stated as “end states,” not actions; policies will be stated as broad actions or approaches *the City* will take to achieve goals.

Option 1: Status Quo	(Preferred) Option 2: (Concept, not exact policy language)
<p><b>GOAL PI1:</b> To establish and maintain City decision processes that include the informed, active participation of all those affected.</p>	<p>Change the goal to encompass a broader range of activities and purposes for engagement (not just decision-making.)</p> <p>Idea for discussion ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>A vibrant civic atmosphere that fosters a sense of community and trust, enhances creative problem solving, and fully informs decisions.</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>PI1.1:</b> Encourage and support the creation of neighborhood organizations and other groups throughout the Olympia Urban Growth Area, in order to help citizens effectively participate in City decision processes.</p>	<p>Replace this policy with new goal and policies:</p> <p><b><i>Goal: Sub-area plans help citizens effectively participate in City decision processes that affect them.</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Represent the entire city, including growth boundaries, in designated sub-areas for planning purposes.</i></li> <li>• <i>Identify the priorities, assets and challenges of a given geographical boundary.</i></li> <li>• <i>Encourage wide participation in the writing and implementation of sub-area plans.</i></li> <li>• <i>Define the role that sub-area plans play in the City's decision-making and resource allocation.</i></li> <li>• <i>Neighborhoods or the City may initiate subarea plans.</i></li> <li>• <i>Encourage collaboration between neighborhoods and City representatives.</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>PI1.2:</b> Provide information about the structure of city government and decisions processes to organizations and the general public to enable effective participation.</p>	<p>Retain policy, broaden slightly:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Provide information about the structure and <u>activities</u> of city government to organizations and the general public.</i></li> </ul>

<p><b>PI1.3:</b> Use City publications, bulk mail, direct mail, the broadcast and print media, and other opportunities to inform affected parties about:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. current or proposed City programs or decisions that may affect them; and</li> <li>b. Opportunities for them to participate in City decision processes.</li> </ol>	<p>Replace this policy with the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Establish and maintain City decision processes that inform and include affected parties.</i></li> <li>• <i>Consistently evaluate new technologies to inform and engage the public.</i></li> <li>• <i>Use creative methods to engage and accommodate people off all backgrounds, ages, locations, physical ability and other characteristics.</i></li> <li>• <i>Communicate early, regularly and thoroughly about City issues and activities. Ensure information and outreach materials are made available through a variety of means.</i></li> <li>• <i>Educate, inform and provide technical assistance to citizens to help them understand the significance of their actions and participate in helping solve complex problems.</i></li> <li>• <i>Choose the best method of engagement based on the issue, scope and resources.</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>PI1.4:</b> Focus debate on policy issues as they affect people's lives, both individually and community-wide, creating opportunities to discuss these issues without polarization.</p>	<p>Retain, but clarify:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Provide engagement opportunities where people can learn more about issues, share their experiences and motivations and discuss public issues in a structured, productive way.</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>PI1.5:</b> Develop public participation plans for major projects or decision processes.</p> <p>In addition to hearings and other formal opportunities for oral and written public comment, use various outreach techniques such as opinion surveys, speakers programs, forums, workshops, open houses, hands-on events, and task forces.</p>	<p>Retain, but clarify:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Develop public participation plans for major projects or decision processes. Public participation plans should clearly define what decisions will be made, who shall make the decision, the timing of the decision, how the public can participate in the decision-making process, and how the public's participation will be used in the decision-making process.</i></li> </ul> <p>The second half of the existing policy is represented more broadly in policies proposed above.</p>

<p><b>PI1.6:</b> Amend the Comprehensive Plan annually to incorporate the updated Capital Facilities Element. Act upon other proposed changes to the Plan concurrently at that time.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Proposed amendments to the Plan which affect the unincorporated growth area will be subject to separate hearings by the Olympia and Thurston County planning commissions.</li> <li>b. The Board of Thurston County Commissioners will act upon requests to amend portions of this plan which pertain to the unincorporated growth area concurrently with all other requests to modify the Thurston County Comprehensive Plan.</li> <li>c. The City of Olympia will coordinate its hearings and action on such requests with the County's schedule.</li> </ul>	<p>Retain policy.</p> <p>To comply with GMA, add an additional policy that establishes a procedure for adopting emergency amendments and defines emergency.</p>
<p><b>PI1.7:</b> Appoint at least one member of the Olympia Planning Commission who is a resident of the unincorporated Olympia Growth Area.</p>	<p>Remove this policy as it is no longer necessary. In 2007, the City adopted a consistent ordinance for all advisory boards. Current rules do not preclude people in the UGA from becoming advisory board members. There is a requirement that at least 50% of the members reside in the city, and no residency restrictions beyond that. The existing policy is somewhat out of the City's control since it depends on who applies for OPC, and somewhat unpractical since the City Council will use best wisdom to fill appointments.</p>

<p><b>PI1.8:</b> Encourage neighborhoods to work with the City to develop Comprehensive Plan monitoring and implementation programs and capital improvement plans for neighborhoods.</p>	<p>Remove this policy. Some of it is captured in the sub-area plan section above.</p> <p>A separate goal and policy regarding use of an implementation strategy that includes citizen and partner participation will be included in the Plan update.</p>
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## Implementation

Also, at the implementation stage, consider the range of City activities and decision-making processes, distinguish the appropriate level of engagement for these various types of actions and develop a tool-box of best practice methods. (This has been done before, and needs to be reinvigorated.)

## Resources

Alliance for Innovation, website, <http://transformgov.org/en/home>, accessed on November 28, 2011.

Carolyn J. Lukensmeyer, Joe Goldman and David Stern, *Assessing Public Participation in an Open Government Era: A Review of Federal Government Plans*, IBM Center for The Business of Government, <http://www.businessofgovernment.org/report/assessing-public-participation-open-government-era>, accessed on September 6, 2011.

City of Olympia, "Focus Meeting Data & Methods Report," <http://olympiawa.gov/documents/IO%20Focus%20Mtg%20Final%20Data%20Methods%20Report%20Oct2010-Mar2011/Focus.mtgs.FINAL.DATA.METHODS.Report.Oct2010-Mar2011.pdf>, accessed November 1, 2011.

James Svava and Janet Denhardt, *Connected Communities: Local Governments as a Partner in Citizen Engagement and Community Building*, Alliance for Innovation, <http://transformgov.org/en/home>, accessed on November 20, 2011.

Matt Leighninger and Bonnie C. Mann, *Planning for Stronger Local Democracy*, <http://www.nlc.org/find-city-solutions/research-innovation/governance-civic-engagement>, accessed on November 20, 2011.

Municipal Resource Services Center, "Governance," <http://www.mrsc.org/subjects/governance/governance.aspx>, accessed on November 30, 2011.

Municipal Resource Service Center, "Strategies for Reconnecting Citizens and Government," <http://www.mrsc.org/focuspub/strategiesmrscfocus.aspx>, accessed on December 5, 2011.

National League of Cities, website, <http://www.nlc.org/find-city-solutions/research-innovation/governance-civic-engagement>, accessed November 30, 2011

Peter Newman and Isabella Jennings, *Cities as Sustainable Ecosystems: Principles and Practices*, Island Press, Washington, 2008.

## Attachments:

- A: [Public Comments from Phase 1 Public Involvement](#)
- B: [Existing Public Involvement Policies - Chapter Twelve](#)
- C: [Draft Document: Olympia Comprehensive Plan Chapter Twelve](#)
- D: [International Association for Public Participation \(iap2\) – Spectrum of Public Participation](#)