

City of Flint  
Planning Department  
Public Participation Plan



August 2023

# Introduction

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A Public Participation Plan is required by the Redevelopment Ready Communities (RRC) program to outline how the public will be engaged throughout the planning and development process. The City of Flint’s Plan is designed to provide a framework for determining the appropriate type and amount of public participation required for various purposes, and also to identify a variety of communication and participation strategies that are appropriate based on the intended audience.

The City of Flint Planning and Development department is committed to engaging Flint residents and stakeholders in authentic and meaningful ways that respect the unique assets and the great diversity within our city and its many communities and neighborhoods. While officially adopted in 2022, this plan is intended to be regularly updated and refreshed based on changing conditions within the city, new projects, and evolving methods for public engagement and communication. **As part of its annual report each year, the planning commission will review this plan and determine whether an update or revisions are necessary.**

# Citizen Participation Plan

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The City of Flint maintains a Citizen Participation Plan as a component of Housing and Community Development programs as required by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. This plan describes the means by which the City of Flint provides for public participation in its Housing and Community Development programs and governs separate activities from the Planning Department Public Participation provided in this document, but the two departments and programs work in concert, with Housing and Community Development serving as a primary means for implementation of Comprehensive Plan goals and objectives. Note, that the term “citizen” is generally not the preferred term when communicating engagement of residents.

# Participation Goals & Objectives

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The following goals are based on the RRC outline for a public participation strategy.

## 1. PUBLIC INPUT DURING THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The City of Flint’s Comprehensive Plan was reviewed in 2018, and the Planning Commission determined that no changes were necessary at that time. The next review cycle will occur in 2023, the process for review and determining whether an update to the Comprehensive Plan is necessary will include:

1. Formal review of the Comprehensive Plan to determine whether it is necessary to amend the existing plan or adopt a new plan during a public meeting of the Planning Commission.
2. Action by the Planning Commission to do one of the following:
  - a. Recognize the current plan as not requiring an update or amendment.
  - b. Recognize the current plan as in need of updates and initiating the process of updating the current plan.
  - c. Recognize the current plan as deficient and initiating the process to adopt a new plan.
3. Communication to City Council of the Planning Commission’s decision, and approval of funding in future budget(s) by City Council to complete a plan update or adopt a new plan if necessary.
4. Initiation of the Comprehensive Plan update or adoption process, consistent with the Michigan Planning Enabling Act (PA 33 of 2008).

Per Section 4-505 of the City of Flint Charter, the Mayor may annually propose amendments to the Comprehensive Plan, and City Council, after review by the Planning Commission, shall consider the mayor's proposed amendments and make the modifications to the plan it deems necessary.

During development of the Imagine Flint Comprehensive Plan, public engagement included a wide range of public meetings, charrettes, and surveys that engaged thousands of Flint residents. During any future updates to the Comprehensive Plan, or adoption of a new plan, a similar approach will be employed that emphasizes engaging residents in all of Flint's neighborhoods through partnerships with community-based organizations, block clubs, and faith-based groups. Engagement should provide for multiple feedback loops throughout the process, and include small focus groups, large community meetings with a charrette-like feel, surveys, and opportunities for in-person and virtual participation, at a minimum.

## **2. BROAD IDENTIFICATION AND INVOLVEMENT OF RESIDENTS**

One of Flint's greatest strengths is the strong neighborhood organizations, grassroots nonprofit organizations, and faith communities that are capable of engaging residents. In addition to communicating opportunities for involvement using traditional means, the city will utilize our partnerships with these organizations to identify residents interested in providing general input, as well as becoming a member of the Planning Commission, Zoning Board of Appeals, historic district commission, and other public bodies.

## **3. EFFECTIVE AND EQUITABLE COMMUNICATION CHANNELS**

Flint's diversity demands a wide range of communication channels and outreach strategies to ensure that all residents and stakeholders are encouraged to engage. Communication channels for public engagement activities will vary widely for each type of project or activity, the following communication channels are available to city staff and partners:

- Public notices in newspapers and community publications.
- Posting to the city's website.
- Social media posts on the city's pages.
- Public service announcements on local radio stations.
- Distribution of event information via community partner organizations.
- Attendance at meetings of neighborhood organizations, block clubs, and community events.

#### 4. ENCOURAGE EFFECTIVE PARTICIPATION

During any public participation event or public hearing, staff will provide an overview of the topic being discussed and provide an opportunity for officials or the public to ask questions about the process, not just the topic at-hand. When responding to questions, staff will use plain language, and wherever possible, communicate information in both written and verbal formats.



#### 5. MAINTAIN AND DEVELOP STAFF EXPERTISE

In addition to the training plan for Planning Commissioners and members of the Zoning Board of Appeals, Planning Department staff are expected to participate in at least one continuing educational program related to public engagement and communication via the Michigan Association of Planning, American Planning Association, or similar professional organization.

#### 6. RECORD RESULTS

Planning Department staff will keep a record of public hearings, input sessions, surveys, and other activities that are undertaken to engage the public each calendar year. This report will be included in the Planning Commission's annual report to the City Council.

#### 7. CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

As part of the annual report, staff will identify public engagement activities for the coming year and identify opportunities to enhance the city's communication with the public. These may include updates to website or social media or enhancing processes and procedures to make the development process more accessible.

## State Regulations

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Along with the desire to include all City of Flint residents and stakeholders in its planning process, the City of Flint relies on state statutes to guide public participation activities. Key statutes are summarized below.

### OPEN MEETINGS ACT

In accordance with the Michigan Open Meetings Act (PA 267 of 1976), the City will hold meetings in Flint City Hall located at 1101 Saginaw Street, which is accessible to the general public. Within 10 days of the first meeting of a public body in each calendar or fiscal year the body will publicly post a list stating the dates, times and places of all its regular meetings at City Hall and on the City's website.

If there is a change in schedule, within three days of the meeting in which the change is made, the public body will post a notice stating the new dates, times and places of regular meetings. For special and irregular meetings, public bodies will post a notice indicating the date, time and place at least 18 hours before the meetings.

Public bodies will hold emergency sessions without a written notice or time constraints if the public health, safety or welfare is severely threatened and if two-thirds of the body's members vote to hold the emergency meeting.

### PLANNING ENABLING ACT

In accordance with the Michigan Planning Enabling Act (PA 33 of 2008) the following parties will be notified via first class mail, personal delivery or electronic mail by the Planning Department (or legislative body if no planning commission exists) of the intent to adopt a new comprehensive plan or an amendment to the existing comprehensive plan and request the recipient's cooperation and comment:

- Genesee County Metropolitan Planning Commission
- Each public utility company, railroad company, and public transportation agency owning or operating a public utility, railroad, or public transportation system within the local unit of government that has requested such notice.
- All adjacent municipalities (Flint Township, City of Burton, Mt. Morris Township, Genesee Charter Township, and Mundy Township)

After the draft comprehensive plan has been submitted to the City Council for review and approval for distribution, the draft plan will be submitted to the previously listed entities for review. Before approving a proposed comprehensive plan, the planning commission will hold not less than one public hearing on the proposed comprehensive plan. The hearing will be held after the expiration of the deadline for comment as outlined in the Planning Enabling Act. The planning commission will give notice of the time and place of the public hearing not less than 15 days before the hearing by publication in a newspaper of general circulation within the local unit of government. The planning commission will also submit notice of the public hearing by first class mail, personal delivery or electronic mail to the previously listed entities for review. After the adoption of the comprehensive plan, the planning commission shall distribute copies of the adopted plan to the previously listed entities and may publish and distribute copies of the comprehensive plan or of any report and employ other means of publicity and education.

## ZONING ENABLNG ACT

In accordance with the Michigan Zoning Enabling Act (PA 110 of 2006), consideration of the following requires advertised public hearings pursuant to the Open Meetings Act:

- Zoning ordinance text amendments
- Zoning ordinance map amendments (rezonings)
- Variances
- Appeals and interpretations of administrative decisions
- Special Land Use requests

The City of Flint will follow the required posting in the Flint Journal, posting at City Hall, the city's website, and mailing to property owners and tenants located within 300 feet of the subject property when the request relates to a particular address.

# Stakeholders

There are many stakeholders involved in planning and development in the City of Flint. This section identifies a few of the organizations the city has identified as a priority for engagement based on previous projects and history. These stakeholders will be engaged during any future comprehensive plan updates, and when the city is considering updates to existing neighborhood plans, major projects, or other key decision-points.

## NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATIONS

The following is a list of neighborhood organizations identified as of Fall 2022. This list is intended to be broad, but it is not all-inclusive. If a neighborhood organization is not on this list and would like to be contacted regarding City of Flint Planning and Zoning actions, please contact the Planning Department to be included on this list, which will be updated annually.

- Flint Neighborhoods United, and the neighborhood organizations it identifies:
  - Brownell Holmes Neighborhood Association
  - Foss Avenue Block Club
  - Flint Residents Organization for Good (FROG)
  - King Avenue Plus
  - Civic Park Neighborhood Association
  - Ballenger Highway Neighborhood Association
  - New Community Block Club
  - Metawanee Hills Neighborhood Association
  - Mott Park Neighborhood Association
  - West Flint Community Watch
  - Carriage Town Historic Neighborhood Association
  - Eastside Coalition
  - Kearsley Park Neighborhood Association
  - Eastside Franklin Park
  - Central Park Neighborhood Association
  - College Cultural Neighborhood Association
  - Grand Traverse District Neighborhood Association
  - Lapeer Park and Oakwood Park Neighborhood Association
  - Neithercut Neighborhood Association
  - South Side Business & Residential Association
  - Circle Drive Neighborhood Association
- Other neighborhood organizations not listed may contact the Planning Department to be included in relevant communications.



## COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

Flint is also home to a wide range of highly engaged community-based nonprofit organizations that are extremely active in their communities. The city maintains close contact with these organizations to support outreach and engagement efforts.

## DEVELOPERS AND BUSINESS OWNERS

Current and prospective business owners and developers are crucial to helping the city identify opportunities to improve processes and procedures, while also identifying new opportunities for economic development. The City of Flint Planning and Development Department works closely with the Economic Development Department, the Downtown Development Authority, and the Flint and Genesee Group to engage private sector leaders, business owners, and prospective developers in the city and region.

## OTHER PUBLIC AND GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES

A wide range of governmental agencies play a strong role in planning and development in Flint. These agencies will be engaged as stakeholders to provide feedback on any proposed plan updates as well as major new development projects.

- Flint Community Schools
- Flint Cultural Center
- Flint Housing Commission
- Flint Public Library
- Genesee County, including but not limited to:
  - Genesee County Parks
  - Genesee County Metropolitan Planning Commission
  - Genesee County Health Department
  - Genesee County Community Action Resource Development (GCARD)
- Genesee County Land Bank Authority
- Greater Flint Health Coalition
- GST Michigan Works!
- Hurley Medical Center
- Kettering University
- Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA)
- Mott Community College
- State of Michigan
- University of Michigan-Flint



## **Early Stakeholder Input on Development Projects**

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The City of Flint encourages developers to conduct early stakeholder outreach prior to public hearings or submitting a formal request for site plan review. This is especially for major rezonings, projects that will significantly impact neighbors, or other controversial developments. Providing early input can help minimize misinformation and help the developer better plan for concerns of surrounding property owners or tenants prior to submitting an application for the public hearing.

If a developer is interested in early stakeholder input on a project, the City of Flint will share a list of addresses that will receive notice of a public hearing with the applicant, as well as contact information for relevant neighborhood organizations and community groups in the area that may be suitable for holding a meeting.

The city recommends the following when gathering early stakeholder input on potential projects:

1. Provide residents and stakeholder with enough information so they can provide feedback, but not so much that it feels like a decision has already been made. Illustrative sketches and site renderings are very helpful.
2. Make attendance for residents easy, particularly for those most impacted by the potential development. The Planning Department strongly recommends hosting an event at a local church or community center and provide early and advance notice of the meeting. Planning Department staff can provide developers with a list of potential locations for events and contact information for owners/operators.
3. Take diligent notes during the meeting and in the application for approval, provide a summary of the feedback received to the Planning Commission, and note how the plans reflect resident input.

If available, City of Flint staff may attend an early input meeting at the request of the developer to answer questions regarding the development review process at the city. City staff will not assist with meeting facilitation, note taking, or any other activity that could be interpreted as providing support for a development project prior to city approval.

The City of Flint has established a conceptual review process for developers, and strongly encourages developers to participate in a conceptual review meeting and to discuss a project with city staff prior to public engagement activities.

# Development and Applicant Feedback Loop

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The City of Flint provides residents and stakeholders a range of opportunities to be involved in the planning, review, and approval process for planning and zoning applications, planning documents, and development projects.

## APPOINTMENT PROCESS

The appointment process for Planning Commission and zoning board of appeals is different in Flint. Planning commission members are nominated by the mayor, and approved by city council, while Zoning Board of Appeals members are nominated and appointed by city council exclusively.

## PUBLIC MEETINGS

In addition to conformance to the Open Meetings Act, meeting agendas and packets of the Planning Commission, and other boards and commissions are made available on the city’s website in advance of the meeting whenever possible or can be requested as part of a FIOA application. The meeting agenda and packet are sent, by mail or e-mail to members the Friday before each meeting.

Applicants for approvals such as for a site plan may request a copy of any or all material being submitted for the meeting. Meeting minutes of the Planning Commission and Zoning Board of Appeals are taken by Planning Department staff and posted to the city’s website once approved.

Opportunities for public comment shall be available at any public meeting in accordance with the Open Meetings Act and provisions in the boards and commissions’ bylaws and other operating policies.

The public hearings scheduled, as described in this Participation Plan, are designed to facilitate public participation in all phases of the community development process. Citizens are encouraged to submit their views and proposals on all public hearings or all parts of community development programs. However, to ensure that citizens are given the opportunity to comment on all facets of the community development program on a continuous basis, citizens may, at any time, submit written comments or complaints to the City of Flint Department Director that pertains to the Public Hearing. All comments or objections to any phase of the planning, development, or approval of Public Hearing topics, or to the implementation of any related project should submit such comments or objections in writing to the appropriate City of Flint Department Director.

The participation of interested persons and their input shall be recorded in the meeting minutes. It is asked that members of the public who wish to speak state their name and address for the public record, although signing in is not a precondition to attending the meeting. Approved meeting minutes, which include the outcome of the public participation, are made available to the public through various methods, including being posted on the city’s website.

## PUBLIC HEARINGS

Notice of public hearings is advertised via newspaper posting, posting on the city website, and posting at City Hall. The city at a minimum will meet the notice requirement outlined in the Michigan Planning Enabling Act and the Michigan Zoning Enabling Act outlined above. For regular City Council meetings, the City Clerk shall post at the City Hall, within 10 days after the first meeting of the Commission in each calendar year, a public notice stating the dates, times, and places of its regular

meetings for the year. If a change in the regular meeting schedule occurs, a public notice will be made within three days after the meeting at which the change is made.

The Planning Department shall give notice of any related public hearing by publication of a notice in a newspaper of general circulation in the City at least 15 days before the date of the public hearing. Public hearings are open to comment from all attendees, and the City of Flint makes accommodations for non-English speakers and those with disabilities whenever possible.

# City of Flint Public Engagement Toolbox

Flint has a wide range of options and tools at its disposal to engage residents and stakeholders in the planning and development process. This section identifies the tools available and provides a process for determine which tools are appropriate for various situations.

## COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Flint is home to an extremely diverse population of residents across classifications of race, age, and economic status. This makes any one communication strategy or approach unlikely to meet all members of a particular neighborhood or area of the city. As a result, whenever public input is sought related to a public project or planning activity that impacts a particular neighborhood or area of the city, multiple communication strategies should be employed, and among those must be collaboration with neighborhood leaders and community organization who have relationships and regular contact with residents. This should also include posting information regarding an event, survey, or public meeting that impacts a particular area at public gathering places as well as haring it via the city's website, social media, community news outlets, and traditional media.

## DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE

Prior to submitting any planning application, an applicant can submit a plot plan or draft plan to the Planning Department for an informal advisory review. This review is typically an in-person meeting and focuses on communicating the process and anticipated timelines to the applicant, as well as reviewing the required forms and documents for submission. During the review planning staff will identify potential zoning compliance issues with the proposed project, but the informal review does not take the place of a formal preliminary review or final review of an application.

Informal reviews may be scheduled by calling the planning department main office line at 810- 766-7426.

## SURVEYS

Surveys are useful in gathering feedback on specific topics from a clearly defined audience. However, the method of sharing surveys and facilitating their completion must be tailored for the intended audience. For example, a survey directed at youth must be written at the appropriate grade level and relatively short compared to a survey directed toward local developers.



While surveys are useful to get a general idea of public opinion regarding specific community issues, they should not be used as the sole method of public input. At a minimum, surveys should always be paired with interviews, a focus group session, or a public meeting to gather more in-depth feedback and provide an alternative communication method.

When a survey is created, it should also always include an electronic version and paper version. Paper versions should be available at City Hall, and depending on the audience, available at key locations within the community (e.g., Community Centers or the Library).

## INTERVIEWS

Interviews allow the city to gather specific information on a topic from a single individual or small group of people. If a particular issue has a disproportionate impact on a subset of the community or if a project is being considered that engages a specific group of stakeholders, interviews are a good tool to gather detailed input. Interviews should be relatively formal and structured so that consistent questions and information regarding a topic is gathered from each interviewee or group that is a part of the process. Good notes should be taken during the interviews so that the information can be recorded, analyzed, and reported out. While interviews are a good tool for gathering in-depth information from a small subset of people, it is important to keep in mind that interview results should not be assumed to be representative of a broad segment of the population.

## FOCUS GROUPS AND SMALL MEETINGS

Like interviews, focus groups or small community meetings are helpful in gathering information on a particular topic or issue from a defined group of people. For example, how a proposed street improvement will impact a particular neighborhood. When conducting focus groups or small community meetings it is important to clearly define the issue and the input the city is seeking from participants, but then to be open to their feedback and let them dictate how the meeting progresses. Again, taking detailed notes or recording the meeting (if the group consents to being recorded) is important for analyzing and reporting on the results of the session later.

## OPEN HOUSES & WORKSHOPS

Open house meetings and community workshops can be simple town hall-style meetings, or more complex planning sessions that include charrette-style feedback opportunities on potential design alternatives. Formal presentations can be given to a large audience and then a less formal exchange of information may follow, or some combination of the two approaches. Open houses and workshops generally provide a more casual and fun setting to encourage participants to think critically and creatively about important issues. They can often include neighborhood residents, youth, leaders, and other stakeholders. The workshops or open houses may be conducted by city staff, or outside consultants or contractors working on a particular project or plan.



Open house meetings and workshops are also an opportunity to educate the community surrounding a specific topic and hear concerns, questions, and ideas. Open house venues need to be accessible and approachable for all attendees and notice and publication of events should be done consistent with the standards in this plan.

## SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media provides a platform for quick and frequent communication to and with the public. With the proliferation of smart phones among many communities, access to information via social media is significant, although it does not include all members of the community. The City of Flint, as well as the Planning Department have several social media accounts designed for various functions, including an Imagine Flint account that continues to have a large following among residents and community organizations following the last Comprehensive Plan. The primary focus of social media communication regarding planning and development is to provide the public with notice of upcoming events or opportunities for input and to make the public aware of important community issues or changes that may impact their community or neighborhood.

## LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY RESIDENTS AND LITERACY CHALLENGES

The City of Flint will make all reasonable efforts to facilitate communications for limited English proficiency residents, so they are able to participate in public meetings, events, and other activities, including providing an interpreter and translating documents. Requests must be made in writing and received at least one week prior to the meeting at which assistance is needed. The City of Flint utilizes the Latinx Technology and Community Center, Arab American Heritage Council, the International Center of Greater Flint, and the Disability Network to provide interpretation and translation services. Additionally, the City of Flint will make accommodations for any residents with limited literacy by providing documents in audio format or other means through partnership with the Flint and Genesee Literacy Network, or other similar agencies.

## SELECTING AN ENGAGEMENT APPROACH

When public communication or input is determined as needed for a particular issue or project, city staff should generally follow the following process to determine the appropriate course of action.

1. **Define the project:** Be sure the project and the purpose for public input is clearly defined. The following questions should be answered:
  - a. What is the activity being undertaken, and what is the desired end result?
  - b. What is the timeline, and is there a clearly defined budget that will impact public engagement activities?
  - c. How will public input be utilized in the decision-making process?
2. **Define the audience:** Who do you want to engage? This should be more specific than just “city residents”. For example, are there residents of a particular area, or residents that share common characteristics (e.g., youth) that you are targeting?
3. **Determine the level of effort:** How much input is the city seeking from participants? Is it feedback related to one-time issue, or is it part of a longer feedback loop for a large project (e.g., a Comprehensive Plan update)?

4. **Select the appropriate engagement method(s):** Based on items 1-3, determine the appropriate method or methods to be undertaken for the project. Develop a timeline for the project, draft agendas, and determine what tools or assistance will be required to achieve the desired end-result.
5. **Promote and advertise:** Advertise and promote the event or program through a variety of channels, including community-based organizations, leaders and stakeholders related to the target audience. **There should be at least two weeks' notice given prior to any public event.**
6. **Record and evaluate:** Record the results of the event via meeting notes, completed surveys, recordings, and other appropriate methods. Then evaluate the overall effectiveness of the event based on how the project was defined. Did the event meet staff and stakeholders' expectations? And if not, what can be done in the future to improve?

## Outreach Strategies by Project Type

The table below defines when various engagement approaches are either required by this plan, encouraged, or optional. If a project or activity is being undertaken that is not identified in this table, the most similar project or activity should be used as a guide, with appropriate changes.

Engagement Approach	Type of Project or Activity					
	Comprehensive Plan Adoption or Amendment	Zoning Ordinance Amendments or Adoption	Capital Improvement Program	Parks and Recreation Master Plan	Major Developments	Neighborhood & Subarea Plans
Community Outreach	Required	Optional	Optional	Required	Optional	Required
Development Assistance	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Encouraged	N/A
Surveys	Encouraged	Optional	Optional	Required	Optional	Required
Interviews	Encouraged	Optional	Optional	Encouraged	Optional	Encouraged
Focus Groups and Small Meetings	Encouraged	Optional	Optional	Required	Encouraged	Required
Open Houses & Workshops	Required	Optional	Optional	Required	Optional	Required
Social Media	Required	Optional	Optional	Required	Optional	Required
Public Hearing(s)	Required	Required	Optional	Required	May be required	Required
Limited English Proficiency	Required					



## **Communicating Results & Evaluating Success**

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Starting with calendar year 2023, the City of Flint Planning Department will keep a record of the number of public engagement activities and outreach conducted over the course of the year, as well as the number of people reached by each.

In the Annual Planning Commission report to City Council, the Planning Department will provide a summary of the activities completed, the number of people engaged, and evaluate the relative success of each activity. Opportunities to enhance public engagement approaches or tools or needs for additional training will be identified to ensure continuous improvement.

The Director of the Department of Planning and Development, along with the Zoning Coordinator will be responsible for ensuring the City of Flint adheres to this public participation plan and that it is regularly updated.