



# **Public Participation Plan**

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# Contents

<b>Overview and Purpose .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Public Participation Goals and Objectives.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Public Participation Requirements.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Stakeholder Outreach.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Public Participation Methods.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Outreach Strategies.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Communicating Results.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Public Participation Evaluation.....</b>	<b>14</b>

## **OVERVIEW AND PURPOSE**

Frequent, regular and active solicitation of input from citizens and organizations that represent a diverse perspective results in the information needed to make the most successful decisions possible. As key facilitators in the City's decision-making processes, the public officials and administrators of the City of Petoskey understand the significant importance of public participation.

The City needs to engage citizens from the very beginning. Soliciting input in all stages of the decision making process contributes to a greater public understanding of the complexities involved in many community projects and also provides transparency in government operations. The active solicitation and consideration of citizen input by City officials enhances the public understanding of their ability and responsibility to impact the future of the community.

To effectively engage the public, there needs to be an explicit plan of action that outlines the purpose and process used in soliciting public input. By creating a public participation plan, the City will be able to retain important organizational knowledge despite employee turnover. Also, by documenting and analyzing information on participation efforts, we will be able to more objectively assess our efforts and readjust accordingly; thus creating a dynamic and responsive set of best practices.

It is important to realize that citizen engagement is a dynamic endeavor - continually changing with each unique situation. A successful practice with one group of citizens might fail to gather the needed input for another group. To this end, this plan is intended to serve as an internal analysis and assessment, providing acknowledgment of successes, missed opportunities and a resource for ideas on how to best engage collaboration in the future. This plan also serves as evidence that the City of Petoskey is dedicated in its role as facilitators of public participation.

## **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

Listed below are concrete participation goals and objectives for the City of Petoskey. In the spirit of collaboration, the development of these goals and objectives has allowed city officials to reach a general consensus on what successful public participation looks like.

- **Seek broad identification and representative involvement of all residents of the community.**  
The diverse characteristics and needs of residents – particularly due to our seasonal nature- require different communication and outreach techniques.
- **Utilize effective and equitable avenues for distributing information and receiving comments.**  
There are many techniques and mechanisms available to ensure that a diverse public is well-informed and able to play a role in the planning process. Recognizing that no single technique or mechanism will work in all cases, it is up to the municipality to consider the special communication needs of the public and use the best approaches to accomplish this objective.
- **Provide educational materials and design participation initiatives that will support and encourage effective participation.**  
Effective participation in the decision-making process requires an understanding of land-use issues and the framework for making local investment decisions. Planning professionals and officials need to be well-versed in and employ visualization techniques that optimize public understanding of issues and concepts. Visualization techniques, including 3-D modeling, can be especially helpful with specific sites or areas of redevelopment.
- **Encourage regional collaboration with local governments and other stakeholder organizations.** By hosting joint public engagement events and sharing public participation data and best practices with other organizations, many of the issues that impact an entire region can be more successfully assessed. Also, the cooperation of resources needed to actively engage the public on a particular topic can lower the costs of public participation and provide broader policy perspective.
- **Maintain and develop staff expertise in all aspects of participation.**  
This includes techniques for bridging language, cultural and economic differences that affect participation; ways to convey issues and information in meaningful ways to various cultural groups; and means for ensuring equitable representation for all segments of the population and sectors of the economy.
- **Support and encourage continuous improvement in the methods used to meet the public need for information and involvement.**  
Public information and involvement methods are continually evolving. The municipality is committed to seeking new and innovative ways to engage and keep the public involved throughout the process.

- **Record results of public engagement and recount these results back to the public.**  
To properly capture the concerns, priorities and vision of the public, the municipality will develop a system to track the various techniques and mechanisms of public input. To maintain transparency and consistency, the municipality will develop a method for sharing public participation with the public.
- **Solicit public participation in the master plan and sub-area plan processes.**  
Throughout the multiple phases of the planning process, extensive participation components are and will continue to be incorporated to foster public participation. Proactive participation denotes early and continuous involvement in important policy or project decisions before they are finalized. There are many opportunities for the public to play a role in shaping short and long-term needs, solutions and funding priorities. The earlier the public is involved in the process, the greater the opportunity to influence important land-use and economic development decisions.
- **Encourage sustained public participation by creating meaningful volunteer opportunities, ad-hoc committees, study groups and other roles that allow citizens greater responsibility in the decision making process.**  
The City has many committees, including those mentioned later in this document, but could expand participation and resident “ownership” through “Friends of” groups for parks, neighborhood organizations, and other issue-specific committees.

## **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION REQUIREMENTS**

The most basic type of facilitation of public participation is mandated in state and federal requirements. The Open Meetings Act (OMA) was developed to ensure that governments were including citizens in the decision making process. Advanced notice of public meetings and restrictions on discussions outside of a public forum serve to ensure that a level of transparency is occurring in government processes throughout the country.

The OMA is fundamental to ensuring the public has a role in policy development and adhering to its mandates is legally required. The City of Petoskey takes these requirements very seriously as legal mandates to assure that due process in decision-making process is maximized.

### **Key definitions**

“Public body” - means any local governing body (including a board, commission, committee, subcommittee, or authority) which is empowered (by state constitution, statute, charter, ordinance, resolution or rule) to exercise governmental or proprietary authority or perform a governmental or proprietary function.

“Meeting -” means the convening of a public body at which a quorum is present for the purpose of deliberating toward or rendering a decision on a public policy.

“Closed session” - means a meeting or part of a meeting of a public body which is closed to the public.

### **The Michigan Open Meetings Act Compliance**

In accordance with the Michigan Open Meetings Act (PA 267 of 1976), the municipality will hold meetings in City Hall, 101 E Lake Street or in another properly posted location as is necessary or preferable. These locations are accessible to the general public. Individuals with disabilities requiring auxiliary aids or services in order to participate in municipal meetings may contact Petoskey City Hall for assistance: City Clerk, (231) 347-2500; 101 E Lake Street; Petoskey, MI 49770.

The public will be notified within ten (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 its principle office.

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 eighteen (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.

Any citizen can request that public bodies put them on a mailing list or an e-mail list so that they are notified in advance of all meetings by contacting Petoskey City Hall: City Manager Administrative Assistant (231) 347-2500, 101 E Lake St., Petoskey, MI 49712. Additionally, the City makes available the option to sign up for an e-mail notification.

### **Meetings**

The OMA requires guidelines during public meetings to ensure the public has an opportunity to be included in the decision making process and to ensure that a record of decisions are kept and are accessible to the public for review. This ensures a level of transparency and keeps decision making in the open.

During each public meeting there must be time allotted for the public to comment.

Minutes must be kept for all open meetings, and are required to contain a record of the public comment and also the following:

- the time, date and place of the meeting
- the members present and absent
- a record of any decisions made at the meeting and a record of all roll call votes

The basic intent of the OMA is to require that public bodies conduct business at open meetings. However, there are times when a closed session is necessary and in these instances, an explanation of the purpose(s) for which a closed session is held must be in the minutes of a regular meeting and separate minutes must be taken of the closed meeting.

## STAKEHOLDER OUTREACH

The City of Petoskey understands that a successful public dialogue is the backbone for the development of a successful community. Without the systematic and consistent incorporation of citizens and other stakeholders in the decision-making processes of our local government, ideas and opportunities will be missed and decisions made without a complete understanding of the potential impacts on our community. Additionally, a regular dialogue between citizens and their local government enhances understanding, contributes to a transparent process and increases trust. By involving our community in the decision-making processes at all stages, citizens are more likely to accept the final outcome of a project and feel that their interests were considered and the best decisions were made.

Local, State and Federal Organizations from both the public and private sectors assist and enhance the City's decision-making process through their input. Ensuring and nurturing these partnerships during a development process is essential. The City of Petoskey is dedicated to local and regional collaboration.

### **Organizations**

The City has a long history of collaboration with public and private sector organizations and citizens towards the goal of bettering our community. Much of the collaboration that has occurred has resulted in the high quality of life we enjoy in the Petoskey area. Examples of this collaboration include:

#### *Parks and Recreation Facilities and Protection of Open Space*

It is the collaboration between the City and the Petoskey Public Schools, North Central Michigan College, Emmet County Parks and Recreation and the Little Traverse Conservancy that has resulted in our athletic complexes including Bates Park, River Road Sports Complex, Tennis Courts, and improved trail connections (North Country Trail).

#### *Community Events*

The City works closely with many organizations to support community events. Working with the Petoskey Regional Chamber of Commerce (Art in the Park, Festival on the Bay, Farmers Market), the Downtown Management Board (Petoskey Rocks, parades, Sidewalk Sales, Winter Open House), and many non-profit service organization walks and runs.

#### *Transportation*

The City collaborates with area jurisdictions, the college and the Tribe on transportation issues and identification of priority road projects through the Petoskey Area Transportation Committee.

#### *Economic Development*

As a regional need and benefit, the City works with several groups on economic development issues including the Northern Lakes Economic Alliance, the Petoskey Regional Chamber of Commerce, the Harbor Springs Municipal Airport, McClaren Northern Michigan and the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC).



### *Non-Profit Organizations*

The City of Petoskey is committed to reaching out to organizations and citizens to collectively solve problems that may arise and create visions for the future. The partnership developed through collaborative efforts strengthens networks and reinforces future relationships. A continuous dialogue with organizational stakeholders should be maintained to facilitate understanding and trust. The City further understands that when efforts are combined, resources can be saved and a better outcome reached. Examples of these agencies include:

- Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians
- Women's Resource Center
- Harbor Hall
- The Petoskey Club
- Friendship Centers of Emmet County
- Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council
- Northwest Michigan Community Action Agency

### *Missed Opportunities*

The City of Petoskey is dedicated to ensuring the public is notified and involved in its decision making processes. We realize that more effort is needed to reach beyond the public meeting, as many residents will simply never attend a meeting even if they are personally invited. Technology and information sharing through the city website helps in this realm, however use of social media has only been minimally used to date. While we know the "usual suspects" that attend meetings, the city does not systematically analyze the data it collects on the citizens who attend public meetings or the nature of the comments that are made. Additionally, no specific demographic characteristics are known about citizen participation.

Although there are numerous stakeholders currently involved in helping to develop and guide the City of Petoskey, the likelihood of underrepresented citizens and organizations is still a reality. The City of Petoskey needs to identify these stakeholders and make a concerted effort at bringing them into the decision making process.

It seems the most difficult demographics to reach are young families and youth. The best way to reach both of these demographic groups is for additional information sharing with the school district, possibly creating a direct link from their website to the City website. Although the City of Petoskey keeps its website updated, there is limited use of social media (marina and downtown office), which could be enhanced through management by a dedicated staff person. There is a requirement for students to attend public meetings, but City officials could improve this age group's understanding of civic involvement by engaging them through government or social studies classes or other projects as the situation arises. Not only would this engage a demographic that is not typically included, but also serve to educate them about civic responsibility and potentially help to create future generations of more active citizens.

## PUBLIC PARTICIPATION METHODS

There are both passive and active methods of public participation, both kinds have been and will continue to be used by the City of Petoskey. A summary of these and when they have been used by the city is provided.

**Passive Practices-** The following methods are passive because they are simply a way of making the public aware that something is going on. Many times, this does not result in involvement of all stakeholders, especially those with visual impairments, non-English speakers, the illiterate, youth, citizens with limited mobility and those who work during the time of the public meeting.

- Newspaper posting
- Website posting
- Flier posting on community hall door
- Announcements at council meeting
- Post card mailings
- Attachments to water bills
- Local cable notification
- Social media sites

**Active Practices-** The following are public participation methods that are less reactive and more focused on education and collaborative visioning. Many of these methods have been used by the city and would not be possible without strong partnerships.

**Surveys-** Surveys are useful for identifying specific areas of interest or concentration from a broad scope of ideas or issues. These areas of interest can then be further explored using other methods like the ones outlined below. A community may use a survey to identify where to start in the planning process, or the general climate surrounding a topic. Surveys can be useful to get a general idea of something, but should not be used as the sole method of public input. It is helpful for a municipality to administer surveys with partners. For example, schools can send surveys home with children, churches can have them available to fill out and neighborhood groups can put them in mail boxes. As with most public input efforts, it is best to vary the delivery method (mailed, handed out, electronic) and include bilingual language if applicable. The city performed a National Citizen Survey in 2010, and has used surveys during the Downtown Strategic Plan process, and the downtown regularly surveys businesses as follow up to downtown events.

**Community Workshops-** These can be as simple as a series of question and answer sessions or as creative as creating a board game. Often workshops are a great way to educate the community surrounding a specific topic and hear concerns, questions and ideas. As noted above, workshop venues need to be accessible and approachable for all attendees. If a meeting is for a neighborhood level project, all effort should be made to hold the workshop in the neighborhood and at convenient times. An experienced meeting facilitator is a must and she must understand the desired input and ultimate use of the input and be able to relay the process. The City has used workshops for the Downtown Strategic Plan, Old Town Emmet Neighborhood Plan, and Parks and Recreation Master Plan.

**Charrettes-** The charrette differs from a workshop because it is a multi-day event where designers and planners work on a plan in-between what are called “feedback loops”. Usually between three and seven days, citizens can come to the “charrette studio”, which is an office on or near the location of the proposed plan or project. Citizens offer ideas while the charrette team facilitates and observes. From these suggestions, the designers and planners change the plan to suit community input and present their creation the next day where the community offers feedback again. This makes up one cycle of a “feedback loop”. There can be up to five feedback loops, resulting in a final plan shortly thereafter. This process can be completed with many different budgets, depending on the expertise of municipal staff and local residents. Charrettes take much planning beforehand. The City held a charrette in the beginning of the Blueprint Petoskey Master Plan process.

**Walkabouts-** Walkabouts offer candid feedback from a variety of stakeholders when discussing a specific area. They can be paired with community workshops or charrettes to measure the perceived safety and comfort of pedestrians in a downtown, neighborhood or corridor. Walkabouts are also useful for identifying desired design, problem properties or safety concerns. The City used a walkabout during the Old Town Emmet Neighborhood Plan process and uses them downtown for issues as varied as bike rack locations and sign ordinance amendment discussions.

**One-on-One Interviews-** Interviews are a great way to get specifics on a topic. Specific community leaders may have been identified, making them ideal candidates for an interview. Some communities have individuals that are very vocal about issues in the community. Interviewing them may give some perspective on how to address their concerns. It is important to remember that one interview reflects the opinion of one individual and should not be considered the standing of the entire community.

**Focus Groups-** Like interviews, focus groups can help to narrow down concepts or get a specific side of the story. The City used focus groups for the Downtown Strategic Plan.

**Social Networking-** Technology offers a unique opportunity to give and receive information to a mass of people. Municipalities can post events, share information and even solicit feedback. This public participation method is best used in conjunction with other methods because it excludes those who do not use social media. To date, the city has only had limited use of social media as noted above.

## OUTREACH STRATEGIES

The City of Petoskey will follow a systematic plan for public engagement in the development of City policy. In helping citizens and other stakeholders to be more involved in the creation process and not simply a reaction to a finished product, the sooner the public is involved, the better. Proactively engaging stakeholders fosters a sense of ownership and prevents delays caused by unforeseen issues. This section outlines how the community has and will be engaged depending on the input sought situation.

### Master Plan

As a visionary policy document, the master planning process must use a wide range of public input methods to develop the goals, objectives and strategies for implementation. In development of the current master plan, a charrette, a steering committee, outreach at public events and public hearings were all used. Whenever major changes to the plan are proposed, additional outreach will be held.

### Zoning Ordinance Update

Like the Master Plan, the Zoning Ordinance is a document that reflects the vision of the community. To this end, it is important the public be involved in its revision. As each revision process is unique and not necessarily related to the entire document, the stakeholders may vary to some extent. However, a general process of public outreach will contain early and frequent public input and a continuous facilitation of involvement throughout the decision making process. The creation of citizen study groups, or ad-hoc committees, or workshops with directly affected property owners will be encouraged when tackling more complicated issues. The thought processes of City Officials will be explained in each public meeting so that citizens are aware of the development if they are not directly involved. Also, one or more public hearings will be held before passage of any ordinance. Particular attention will be paid to public outreach and communication when dealing with controversial development projects. The website will be updated and social media and e-newsletter updates will be sent out regularly on decision-making processes and projects. Recent examples of changes that went through this process include the creation of two new zoning districts adjacent to the Central Business District. Information on these changes was presented to the Downtown Management Board for input and a workshop was held for all affected property owners to explain the impacts of the proposed zoning changes.

### Downtown Strategic Plan

Downtown Petoskey is an economic driver for the city and its success is essential to the Petoskey identity and thus another important area for citizens and stakeholders involvement. The Downtown Management Board and Downtown Development Authority are the public bodies that represent downtown businesses, property owners and residents, subject to public policy as determined by City Council. While we are not a Main Street community, the DMB/DDA did come out of a merchants group back in the 1990s, the Gaslight Merchants Group. The downtown office follows a modified four-point approach through its committee structure.

- Downtown Marketing Committee
- Downtown Design Committee
- Downtown Events Committee.
- Downtown Economic Development Committee

In addition to the active participation of these volunteer committees, citizens will be involved frequently throughout plan implementation and updates. Information will be shared and input sought through the downtown newsletter, the website, social media, traditional media outlets and in public meetings on decision making processes and opportunities to become a part of the discussion.

### Policy Development/Decision-Making

In government, there is a continual evolution of policies and situations in which action/decisions are required but are not easily apparent. These decisions require extensive research and often expert advice is needed for them to be properly analyzed. The City of Petoskey understands that policy decisions can be complex and multi-faceted and often difficult to communicate to the public. For this reason, Petoskey has committed itself to constant communication with the public during any decision-making process in which it may be engaged.

Additionally, the city wants to include the public in this process from the start. By including stakeholders and citizens in policy development and decision making from the beginning, the City will have improved decisions by securing a greater variety of insights and ultimately creating better public policy.

An example of how the City includes the public in the decision-making process is illustrated by recent outreach with regards to the City Council goal setting session.

### **COMPLETING THE FEEDBACK LOOP (COMMUNICATING RESULTS)**

Communicating back to the public the information gathered during the public involvement process will result in another layer of transparency and a greater understanding from the public that we value public input and are actively seeking to involve the citizens in our community.

Municipalities have many venues of communication: television, newsletters, the municipal website, social media. The appropriate venue to communicate, who is responsible for this communication and how soon after the public participation event are all dependent on the situation at hand. There is no one way of communicating.

In general, the following is a list of ways the City will communicate public feedback.

**Public Meetings-** City Council meetings minutes will be posted on line no later than one week after the minutes are approved. For other public body meetings, minutes will also be made available on line. Video broadcast of council meetings are available through public access television.

**Surveys-** Surveys performed by city staff will be compiled by a designated staff person and posted no later than one week after the survey was completed. The results, or a link to the results, will be posted online, sent out in the e-newsletter and on social media and published in the City newsletter.

**Community workshops/ Charrettes-** A City official will be charged with taking notes during community workshops and charrettes and getting names, addresses and emails of all in attendance. These notes will be posted on the City website (Facebook Page) no later than one week after the workshop or the charrette. In addition, the results of these events will be sent to participants via email and the meeting summary will be publicized at other public meetings such as City Council and Planning Commission.

**Walkabouts-** The facilitator(s) of walkabouts will take notes during the walkabout. A summary of the input received will be produced and posted on the City website within two weeks of the walkabout.

**One-on-one interviews-** Interview results will be kept confidential for the comfort of the participants unless requested otherwise, but a summary of all comments will be compiled.

**Focus groups-** Focus group results will be kept confidential for the comfort of the participants unless requested otherwise, but a summary of all comments will be compiled.

**Standing committees- Recommendations coming out of standing committees will be summarized and provided to the board or commission to which they report.**

**Social networking-** The Office of City Manager will be responsible for monitoring the municipal social networking sites. The Office will respond to public posts no later than 24 hours after the post was made and will make posts on behalf of the municipality concerning community events and public participation results.

## **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION EVALUATION**

The Plan will be formally reviewed on an annual basis. A City official will be responsible for keeping records of the participation efforts and will be responsible for compiling the data and presenting it to the City and public with suggestions for actions. The results should identify strengths and weaknesses and give examples of how to adjust our behavior to better maximize outreach. However, if the plan is implemented as stated, the feedback loop should create a continuous review process that enables City officials to successfully make changes through a consistently improved upon, dynamic process.