

# City of Hart

## Public Participation Guidebook



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## Overview and Purpose

Engaging citizens through a planning process is crucial to the success of the plan. Soliciting input throughout the duration of the process contributes to a greater public understanding of the various complexities involved in many community projects and also provides greater transparency in local government operations. Solicitation and consideration of community input by City officials enhances the public's understanding of their ability and responsibility to affect the future of the community. As key facilitators in the City's decision-making process, the public officials and administrators of the City of Hart understand the significance of public participation.

In order to effectively engage the public, there needs to be an explicit plan of action which outlines the purpose and process used in soliciting input from the public. Creating a public participation plan ("P<sup>3</sup>" as referred to by the Michigan Economic Development Corporation's Redevelopment Ready Communities program) will allow the City to thoughtfully engage the public during major planning, zoning, and development projects and retain institutional knowledge over time. Moreover, by documenting and analyzing information on participation efforts, the City of Hart will be able to more objectively assess its efforts and adjust accordingly thereby creating a dynamic and effective set of best practices the City may consult for future uses.

The City of Hart has developed this document to help guide decisions for formulating public information gathering processes during planning and development projects and the application of best case practices. This document contains a series of policies and procedures for public involvement and outreach for tasks such as: master plan updates, zoning ordinance and map updates, capital improvement project planning and review, parks and recreation plan updates, major development projects (Planned Unit Developments, special land uses, or other), and development projects involving publicly-owned properties.

Public engagement is a not a "one size fits all" exercise. Certain strategies are more appropriate in some circumstances than others, and a successful practice in one situation may not be as successful in another. To this point, this guide is intended to serve as an internal resource for ideas on how to best engage productive collaboration with stakeholders and the public in the future.

## Public Participation Goals

This guide emphasizes the City of Hart's commitment to meaningful and effective means of communication with stakeholders and citizens throughout planning and development processes. The public participation tools described in this guide do not preclude additional engagement efforts but should serve as a starting point for consideration of the appropriate type and extent of planned public involvement.

The list below contains the goals in which the City of Hart seeks to accomplish through the application of this guide.

1. **Solicit public participation in key phases of the planning process.** Stakeholders and citizens shall be involved at key phases of planning process to ensure maximum value of the input received. Proactive participation includes 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.

2. **Seek broad representative involvement and utilize effective and equitable avenues for distributing information and receiving comments.** The diverse characteristics and needs of residents requires different communication and outreach techniques. For instance, opportunities and outreach efforts will vary to ensure representative involvement. Depending on the geography of an affected area, outreach may be in-person communication, online, posted by signs, published, or by written correspondence. Additionally, opportunities for feedback will also vary, such as meetings, door-to-door polling, surveys, or open houses. There are a number of ways 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 City to consider the special communication needs of the public and use the best approaches to accomplish this goal.
3. **Provide educational materials and design participation initiatives that will support and encourage effective participation.** Providing materials such as advertising fliers, presentations, infographics, or other forms of visualizations are helpful means to bring stakeholders and residents up to date on various planning, zoning, or development projects.
4. **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.
5. **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 City of Hart is committed to seeking new and innovative ways to engaging and keeping the public involved throughout the process.
6. **Record results of public engagement and recount these results back to the public.** In order to properly obtain feedback from stakeholders and the public, the City of Hart shall track and document input received during various public input opportunities. The City additionally will seek to develop a method for sharing received input with the public. This promotes transparency as well as allows stakeholders and the public to know their voices have been heard.

## Public Participation Requirements

Basic requirements for public participation are mandated in state and federal laws for certain public projects and development reviews. The City, through the work of City Council and the various boards and commissions which serve at its pleasure, shall follow the local and state regulations listed below. These regulations include provisions for the public review process, public participation, and public hearings.

### Michigan Open Meetings Act

The Open Meetings Act was developed with the basic intent of requiring public bodies to conduct business at open public meetings. The Open Meetings Act is fundamental to ensuring the public has a role in policy development and adhering to its mandates is legally required.

Side bar:

#### Key definitions

Public body – 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 – 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 – a meeting or part of a meeting of a public body which is closed to the public.

Decision – a determination or vote of a public body to formulate public policy.

#### Notification of meetings

The public body must post a notice stating the dates, times, and places of all its meetings.

#### Closed meetings

The law provides for closed meetings in a few specified circumstances

#### Minutes of a meeting

Minutes must be kept for all open meetings are required to contain:

- A statement of the time, date, and place of the meeting;
- The members present as well as absent;
- A record of any decisions made at the meeting and a record of all roll call votes; and
- An explanation of the purpose(s) for which a closed session is held.

Separate minutes must be taken of closed meetings.

In accordance with the Michigan Open Meetings Act (PA 267 of 1976), the City of Hart will hold meetings at City Hall located at 407 South State Street which is accessible to the public (or in another properly posted location as is necessary or preferable). Individuals with disabilities requiring auxiliary aids or services in order to participate in municipal meetings may contact the City Clerk for assistance: (231) 873-2488. Additionally, any citizen may request that public bodies place them on a mailing or email list so they may be notified in advance of all meetings by contacting the City Clerk.

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 primary 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 may 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.

### Michigan Planning Enabling Act

In accordance with the Michigan Planning Enabling Act (PA 33 of 2008), the following parties are notified via first-class mail, personal mail, or email by the City's Planning Commission of the intent to plan and request the recipient's cooperation and comment:

- West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission (regional planning commission);
- Oceana County Planning Commission (county planning commission);
- Hart Township Planning Commission and Golden Township Planning Commission (adjacent municipalities);
- Each public utility company, railroad company, and public transportation agency owning or operating a public utility, railroad, or public transportation system within the City of Hart, as well as all other government entities which register its name and mailing address for the purpose with the planning commission; and
- Oceana County Road Commission and Michigan Department of Transportation (if the master plan will include a master street plan).

After the draft master plan has been submitted to 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 master plan, the City's Planning Commission will not hold less than one public hearing on the proposed master plan. The hearing will be held after the expiration of the deadline for comment as outlined in the 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 the Oceana Herald Journal of general circulation within the Hart area. The Planning Commission will also submit notice of the public hearing by first class mail, personal delivery, or email to the previously listed entities for review. After adoption of the master plan, the Planning Commission may public and distribute copies of the master plan or of any report, and employ other means of publicity and education.

### Michigan Zoning Enabling 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 text amendments
- Zoning map amendments
- Variances
- Appeals
- Interpretations
- Special land uses

In all the above cases, the City of Hart shall provide public notice of the hearing in a newspaper of general circulation in the area not less than 15 days before the date of the hearing and all persons to whom real property is assessed within 300 feet of the subject property and to the occupants of all structures within 300 of the subject property shall be notified.

## Key Stakeholders

Stakeholders represent a diverse set of individuals, groups, and organizations which have a vested interest or are affected by the planning and land use development process. Different groups of stakeholders may be engaged in each of the planning and development review processes dependent upon the nature of the project or plan, level of community interest, and the potential impact of the project.

Local, state and federal organizations from both the public and private sectors assist and enhance the City's decision-making process through their input. Stakeholders include, but are not limited to:

- City Council
- City's Boards and Commissions
- Hart Main Street
- Hart Chamber of Commerce
- Major employers
- Commercial business owners
- Hart Public Schools
- Michigan State University – Oceana County Extension
- Oceana County
- West Michigan Shoreline Redevelopment Commission
- Neighboring municipalities
- Religious groups
- Community organizations
- Senior groups
- Social organizations
- Students

The City of Hart is dedicated to ensuring the public is notified and involved in its decision-making processes. 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 can be increased. While there are regulars who 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 Hart, the likelihood of underrepresented citizens and organizations is still a reality. The City of Hart shall work to identify these stakeholders and make a concerted effort at bringing them into the decision-making process.

## Opportunities for Public Participation

The City provides Hart residents and stakeholders with numerous opportunities to get involved in the planning, review, and approval process for planning processes.

### Development Review Bodies

**City Council.** The City Council is the legislative and policy-making body for the City government. The Mayor and Mayor Pro Tem are appointed by the elected Council. The Council appoints the City Manager who is responsible for the day-to-day administration of city government.

**Boards and Commissions.** The City encourages citizen participation in local government planning and policy decisions. Therefore, all citizens are invited to apply for appointments to the City's boards and commissions. These groups provide recommendations to the City Council on a variety of topics and issues. The members of the boards and commissions help to analyze options and influence important decisions on behalf of the community.

In general, depending on the nature and location of the project, many of the boards and commissions may review a proposed plan or land use project. These boards and commissions function in two distinct capacities in the public policy process in Hart - advisory and administrative. Some will serve in both capacities.

Each advisory board or commission makes recommendations to the City Council based on the scope of its particular service area. Typically, advisory boards and commissions have a work agenda in place for a calendar year during which it undertakes projects, deliberates on issues, and hosts special events. The City Council is responsible for making the final decisions on most issues or topics, but it will look to these groups for advice, background information, and analysis. As the elected body, the City Council has discretion to accept advice in full, in part, or not at all. Certain boards and commissions have an additional administrative role. This means that they are permitted or required by charter, statute or ordinance to conduct formal reviews and issue administrative decisions. These decisions are then sent to the City Council as official recommendations.

### Public Meetings

In addition to conformance to the Open Meetings Act, meeting agendas and packets of the City Council, Planning Commission, and other boards and commissions should be made available on the City's website in advance of the meeting. The meeting agenda and packet are sent, by mail or e-mail, to all land use applicants. Meeting minutes of the City Council and the City's boards and commissions are coordinated by the staff liaison and posted on the City's website once approved.

### Public Comments

Opportunities for public comment shall be available at any meeting of the City Council or City's boards and commissions in accordance with the provisions in the boards and commissions' bylaws and other operating policies. The meeting agenda allows for public comments under a 'Public Comment' section. The participation of interested persons and their input shall be recorded in the meeting minutes. 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

The City Council and its various boards and commissions shall hold public hearings when called for in their local and State enabling legislation, or when otherwise prudent, to provide the opportunity for public comment on specific topics.

**Hart Planning Commission.** The Planning Commission shall consider holding public hearings for all land use and development applications (site plan, special land use permit, or rezoning request) that come before them though this is not required by State law to do so for all applications. The Zoning Administrator shall schedule and publish the notification of a public hearing before the Planning Commission in a newspaper of general distribution in the City not less than 15 days prior to the hearing on a site plan application as mandated by the commission's bylaws. Land use and development application notifications shall be sent by mail to the applicant, the owner of the subject property, and the owners of property within 300 feet of the subject property. The Planning Commission meeting agenda and meeting packet shall be made available on the City's website in advance of the meeting. The applicant and the City Council shall receive written notification of the Planning Commission's recommendation.

**Hart City Council.** The City Council shall hold a public hearing when called for in their enabling legislation. On receipt of the report of the Planning Commission, the City Council shall set a date for a public hearing for consideration of any proposed zoning ordinance update or rezoning. State and federal statutes require that special use permits and rezoning applications be noticed in a newspaper of general distribution in the City no less than 15 days prior to the City Council public hearing. Application notifications shall also be sent by mail to the applicant, the owner of the subject property, and the owners of property within 300 feet of the subject property.

The special use permit applicant and the Zoning Administrator are notified in writing of the City Council's action by the City Clerk within five days of the action. Following adoption of an ordinance to amend or update the zoning district boundaries or the district regulations, the ordinance shall be filed with the City Clerk and a notice of the ordinance adoption shall be published in a newspaper of general circulation in Hart within 15 days after adoption.

**Other Boards and Commissions.** Other relevant boards and commissions will hold public hearings as needed and as required by the individual boards and commissions bylaws. The public hearings will be noticed as required in advance of the meeting. All meeting agendas and packets shall be made available before the meeting on the City's website.

## Toolbox of Strategies

The public participation toolbox is virtually limitless – from tried and true methods to more creative methods. The City will strive to ensure that more than one notification and communication method will be used depending on the specific project and target audience. This list is flexible and can change based on needs and circumstances.

### Basic announcement methods for public meetings

The following methods are used to advertise the public meetings of the City Council, Planning Commission, and other boards and commissions acting as advisory bodies to the City Council when taking action on land use or development applications. Many times, this does not result in involvement

of all stakeholders, especially those with visual impairments, non-English speakers, those who are illiterate, youth, individuals with mobility limitations, and those who work during the time in which public meetings are commonly held.

- Newspaper posting
- Website posting
- Flier posting on City Hall door
- Announcements at council meetings
- Postcard mailing
- Attachments to utility bills
- Local cable notification

The City will strive to ensure that more than one notification and communication method will be used depending on the specific project and target audience. This list is flexible and can change based on needs and circumstances.

### Proactive practices

The following are some example public participation methods that are less reactive and more focused on education and collaboration. Many of these methods have been used by the City and are most successful with strong partnerships with stakeholders.

**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 public opinion regarding specific community issues 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 or 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 in certain cases.

**Open House Meetings and Community Workshops.** Open house meetings and community workshops can be as simple as a series of question and answer sessions with the public or as creative as interactive map exercises. Formal presentations can be given to a large audience and then less formal exchange of information may follow. They provide a more casual and fun setting to encourage participants to think critically and creatively about important issues. Oftentimes open house meetings are a great way to educate the community surrounding a specific topic and hear concerns, questions, and ideas. As noted above, open house venues need to be accessible and approachable for all attendees. Further, volunteers must be available and knowledgeable on a project to encourage feedback from participants. An orientation session is essential prior to commencement.

**Charrettes.** The charrette differs from a workshop because it is a multi-day event where designers and planners work collaboratively. Citizens offer ideas while the charrette team facilitates and observes. This tool may most often be used for specific development projects that involve significant changes to the urban form and require public input on the design layout. The City may encourage developers to hold charrettes for specific proposed projects with significant community interest.

**Walking Tours.** Walking tours allow more candid and casual feedback from participants. They can be paired with community workshops or charrettes to measure the perceived safety and comfort of pedestrians in a downtown, neighborhood or corridor. Walking tours are also useful for identifying desired design, problem properties, or safety concerns.

**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 from different perspectives. Focus groups can be used to invite multiple stakeholders to the table to gather perspectives and interests of various in one setting.

**Social Media / Web Presence.** Depending on the type of project, information should be incorporated into online sources. Further, more intensive projects may have project-specific websites not only to provide information but to allow for comments and interaction. Technology offers a unique opportunity to give and receive information to a mass of people. Municipalities can post events, share information on projects and planning and developments processes, and even solicit feedback.

**Public Participation Matrix**

As stated previously throughout this section, the various outreach strategies have a multitude of different uses and applications. Some processes lend themselves better to certain strategies. The table below provides a guide of when certain outreach methods may be optimal based upon which type of process the City is undergoing.

	Master Plan	Zoning Amendments	CIP Planning	Parks and Recreation Planning	Major Developments
Surveys	Recommended	Potentially	Recommended	Recommended	
Open House Meetings	Recommended	Potentially	Recommended	Recommended	Potentially
Charrettes	Potentially			Potentially	Potentially
Walking Tours	Potentially	Potentially	Potentially	Potentially	Potentially
One-on-One Interviews	Potentially	Potentially	Potentially	Potentially	Potentially
Focus Groups	Potentially	Potentially	Potentially	Potentially	Potentially
Social Media / Web	Recommended	Potentially	Potentially	Recommended	Recommended

## Outreach Strategies

The City's goal is to 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 Update

As the visionary policy document for future development in the City, the master planning process must use a wide range of public input methods to develop the goals, objectives and strategies for implementation. The City of Hart shall follow, at a minimum, the provisions of Michigan Public Act 33 of 2008, as amended (the Michigan Planning Enabling Act, M.C.L. 125.3801 et. seq.) for the adoption of a new master plan or of an update to the master plan.

The Planning Commission shall send a notice to all stakeholders as listed in the State enabling legislation; the notice will explain that the Planning Commission intends to prepare a plan and request cooperation and comment on the plan now and when the plan is drafted. The Planning Commission and the City will then begin work on drafting or updating the plan. They shall involve the public through many of the methods listed in the section 'Toolbox of Strategies,' including, but not limited to surveys, open houses, community meetings, community walks and tours, website updates, and social media. The City shall encourage the involvement and participation of all stakeholders, including any marginalized groups that may be typically less involved in the planning process. Stakeholder involvement is encouraged from the beginning and the results of such public participation are made available to the community and participants and incorporated as much as is reasonably possible in the drafted plan or plan amendment.

In preparation, studies of existing conditions and probable growth should be done for the basis of the plan. The Planning Commission may make use of expert advice and information from federal, State, County, and municipal officials, departments, and agencies having information, maps, and data pertinent to the City. The City may consult with representatives of adjacent local units of government with respect to their planning so that conflicts in master plans and zoning may be avoided. The City may cooperate with all departments of the State and federal governments and other public agencies concerned with programs for economic, social, and physical development within the planning jurisdiction and seek the maximum coordination of the local unit of government's programs with these agencies.

The City shall encourage and track the public participation through a variety of means, including minutes, public recording of meetings, comment cards, sign-up sheets, and input received verbally, through written correspondence or through website comments, and other means as appropriate.

The Planning Commission will act to submit the proposed plan to the City Council for review and comment. The process of adopting the master plan shall not proceed further unless the City Council approves the distribution of the proposed plan. The City Council shall act on the proposed plan during a public meeting held in accordance with the Open Meetings Act. The City Council shall decide on the approval of the distribution of the proposed plan to local governments and agencies for review and comments.

If the City Council approves the distribution of the proposed plan, it shall notify the secretary of the Planning Commission, and the secretary of the Planning Commission shall submit, in the manner provided by the State enabling law a copy of the proposed plan, for review and comment, to all of the units listed in the State enabling law. These entities may submit comments on the proposed plan to the Planning Commission within 63 days after the proposed plan was submitted to that entity (or 42 days in the case of a master plan update).

Before approving the proposed master plan, the Planning Commission shall hold not less than one (1) public hearing on the proposed plan. The hearing shall be held after the expiration of the deadline for comment. The Planning Commission shall 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 Hart.

The proposed plan shall be approved by resolution of the Planning Commission carried by the affirmative votes of not less than 2/3 of the members. A statement recording the Planning Commission's approval of the plan, signed by the chairperson or secretary of the Planning Commission, shall be included on the inside of the front or back cover of the master plan document. Following approval of the proposed master plan, the secretary of the Planning Commission shall submit a copy of the plan to the City Council. Approval of the proposed plan by the Planning Commission is the final step for adoption of the plan, unless the City Council by resolution has asserted the right to approve or reject the plan. In that case, after approval of the proposed plan by the Planning Commission, the City Council shall approve or reject the proposed plan. A statement recording the City Council's approval of the master plan, signed by the City Clerk, shall be included on the inside of the front or back cover of the master plan if the City Council takes action on the Plan.

### Zoning Ordinance Update

The zoning ordinance is a document that reflects the vision of the community by regulating the character and type of development. To this end, it is important the public be involved in the adoption of amendments to the zoning map or to specific regulations contained in the text of the zoning ordinance. As each amendment 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 City Council may of its own motion, or shall upon petition signed by the owners of a majority of the property proposed for rezoning, prepare an ordinance amending or changing the district boundaries or district regulations. The ordinance shall be introduced by City Council and then referred to the Planning Commission for review and recommendation. It may be necessary for the Planning Commission and/or the City Council to defer action to one or more subsequent meetings to gather further information or to accommodate additional review and debate.

Prior to submitting its recommendation to the City Council, the Planning Commission will hold a public hearing. The City Council will, on receipt of the report of the Planning Commission, set a date for a second public hearing for consideration of the proposed amendment. After the public hearing, the City Council may choose to approval, deny, or table the proposed amendment.

There are special circumstances, however, such as a written protest against a zoning amendment by property owners. Whenever a written protest against such proposed amendment, signed by the owners of 20 percent or more of the area of land proposed to be altered or by the owners of 20 percent of the area of land within 100 feet of any part of the boundary of the land proposed to be altered, excluding any publicly-owned land from either calculation, shall be filed with the City Council, the rezoning ordinance shall not be passed except by at least a two-thirds vote of all members of the City Council. The ordinance will be noticed in a newspaper of general distribution in the City at least 15 days prior to the hearing. The notification will also be sent by mail to the applicant, the owner of the subject property, and the owners of property within 300 feet of the subject property. Following adoption of the ordinance to amend the district boundaries or the district regulations, the ordinance will be filed with the City Clerk, and a notice of the ordinance adoption will be published in a newspaper of general circulation in East Lansing within 15 days after adoption. The ordinance will take effect upon the expiration of seven days after its publication, unless a later effective date is specified by the City Council, or unless a notice of intent to file a petition seeking to submit the ordinance to the electors of the City for action is filed with the City Clerk within seven days after publication of the ordinance amendment.

Particular attention shall be paid to public outreach and communication when dealing with controversial zoning ordinance amendments or controversial development proposals. The website shall be updated regularly on decision-making processes and projects.

#### **Parks and Recreation Plan**

Similar to the master planning process, the parks and recreational planning process must also utilize a wide array of public involvement strategies. The Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) provides financial assistance through its recreation grants program to communities with the State of Michigan to acquire land for parks and to develop recreation facilities. The DNR mandates that municipalities undergoing a parks and recreation plan update must employ no less than two (2) types of public input strategies as detailed in the 'Toolbox of Strategies' section of this document.

It is important to involve the public early in the process through public meetings, surveys, community workshops, open house events, or other means before the draft plan is written. It is highly recommended that additional effort be put forth to solicit comments from residents living in the vicinity of future projects and from those who may be negatively affected by the proposed projects. Special efforts must be made to involve segments of the population whose concerns are often overlooked. These public participation methods should be well-advertised and held at an easily-accessible location.

Once the draft plan has been completed by the Planning Commission or Recreation Committee, citizens must be provided with a well-advertised opportunity of at least one (1) month or 30 days to review and comment before it is officially adopted. Ideal locations to allow the public to view the draft plan is at a public library, City Hall, or the City's website. Comments should be collected via mail, email, or other means. A finalized draft shall then be recommended for adoption to City Council.

Once the 30-day public review period has concluded and a finalized draft has been prepared, the City Council shall hold an advertised public hearing in accordance with the Open Meetings Act. The meeting minutes shall reflect whether there was public comment and the nature of the comments received during the public hearing.

### Capital Improvement Program Planning

A capital improvement program (CIP) plan is a short-range plan, typically four to ten years, which identifies capital projects and equipment purchases, a ranking of projects and purchases in order of preference, the plan for financing the items, a timetable for the construction or completion of the project, justification for the project, and an explanation of expenses for the project. The City of Hart is committed to working with stakeholders such as Hart Public Schools and the Parks and Recreation Department to make the best use of public funds. While planning for capital improvements can largely be very technical and difficult to become engaged, City Council shall hold a public hearing for the adoption of the CIP plan and post the plan in an easily-accessible location on the City's website for the public to view.

### Major Developments

The City shall follow, at a minimum, the provisions of the local and State regulations, as listed in this guide, to review development projects that involve the approval of planning and zoning applications and permits. This applies to the review process for site plans and special use permits, rezoning requests, and variance request applications. In many circumstances, the City Council and its boards and commissions will hold public hearings, noticed in accordance with the State legislation, and allow for public comment on the proposed development project during its regular meetings. Depending on the nature of project, the community interest, and community's financial involvement, additional methods of engagement may be used to gather community feedback.

## Steps for Determining the Appropriate Plan

Prior to conducting a planning process, such as a master plan update, parks and recreation plan update, or other similar process, the City of Hart shall create a Public Participation Plan to help define and guide the methods for achieving optimal public participation.

Most public participation plans will be simple and short; however, large projects with multiple public participation activities may need to be more detailed.

The purpose of the public participation plan is to help the City think through a project and to design activities that will meet the project's public participation goals. A well-planned approach will save time and effort in the long-run.

Below are ten (10) steps to formulating a successful public participation plan:

#### **Step 1.** Describe the Project

The first step in developing a public participation plan is to provide a clear project description to lay the foundation for a successful and achievable public participation process within the timeline, geographic area, staff and budget limitations of the overall project. This information will be used to explain the project to those persons subsequently engaged in public participation activities of the Plan. This will also help communicate the boundaries of public participation in planning, program development, or decision processes.

**Step 2.** Assess Level of Public Concern or Interest

To determine the appropriate level of public participation, it is important to assess the degree to which the public considers the issue significant. The public will become involved according to its perception of the seriousness of the issue. Therefore, it is important to anticipate the public's level of interest or concern regarding a project or program.

**Step 3.** Determine Level of Public Concern or Interest

After assessing the level of public interest or concern using the worksheet in Step 2, it will be easier to plan for the appropriate level of public participation and establish effective goals.

**Step 4.** Identify Public Participation Goals

After determining the appropriate level of public participation for the project, the next step is to define the goals for inviting the public to participate.

**Step 5.** Identify Stakeholders

With goals and public participation levels in hand, it is easier to identify stakeholders and what level of public outreach is needed. When creating the list of stakeholders, make sure audiences who may not typically be engaged are considered to try to cover a broad range of citizens.

**Step 6.** Select Tools

Different public participation goals typically require different tools and approaches. This guide provides several proven strategies to employ during various types of projects.

**Step 7.** Create a Schedule

Any public participation plan should include a detailed timeline of the planning, program development or decision-making processes as well as the public participation activities within that process. Public information and input need to be timed early enough to provide the public adequate opportunity to influence the decision.

**Step 8.** Identify Roles and Responsibilities

Identify everyone who has a role and/or responsibility in the planning, program development or decision-making processes. Most importantly, identify an overall public participation manager responsible for tracking progress and completing each activity. Clearly identify who the "ultimate decision makers" are with regard to the project. This will be very helpful to have before beginning the development of public information materials and making presentations to stakeholders, who will want to know how, when and by whom the decision is going to be made.

**Step 9.** Gather and Disseminate Input and Results

If the public participation goals include public input, involvement or collaboration, there is an added responsibility of disseminating the public's input to decision makers and back to the public at large. This "feedback loop" is necessary to demonstrate to the public that their time and effort has been well invested and their comments and concerns have been understood and accurately communicated to



decision makers. It also shows the public how their input has been translated and influenced the project, policy, or program.

#### **Step 10.** Evaluate Effectiveness

Evaluation should be an explicit part of the design for any public participation activity or plan. Too often, evaluation is ignored or begun too late to help improve the project. Involving stakeholders in designing and conducting the evaluation is a further way of partnering with the public and creating a transparent process. Plan to constantly monitor and evaluate the outcomes of its public participation efforts throughout the life of the project and make revisions as needed.

## 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 the 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 strive to communicate public feedback.

**Public meetings.** City Council, Planning Commission, and all other municipal board and commission meetings minutes shall be posted on the City's website.

**Surveys.** Surveys created by City staff will be compiled by a designated staff person, and the City shall have results posted after the survey completion. The results, or a link to the results, may be posted online and on social media and published in the City newsletter.

**Open Houses / Community workshops / Charrettes.** A City official will be charged with taking notes during public open houses, community workshops, or charrettes and getting names, addresses, and emails of all in attendance. In addition, the results of these events shall be sent to participants via email, and the meeting summary shall be publicized at other public meetings such as City Council and Planning Commission.

## Public Participation Evaluation

This guide 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.