



City of Big Rapids
Public Participation Plan
2019



City of Big Rapids

Public Participation Plan

City Commission

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Introduction

The City of Big Rapids encourages public participation in City efforts. This encompasses a range of opportunities, from serving on City boards and commissions to filling out surveys, from calling City Hall with concerns to attending special events. A public participation plan is essential for outlining how public engagement will be encouraged during the different projects and efforts of the City.

This plan allows for various means to share and receive information in ways that are adjusted in content and intensity according to the size and scope of the project at hand. Additionally, the Public Participation Plan is a tool for accountability and transparency, requiring the City to seek public input as well as record and share the results. This Plan also establishes regular methods for the City to utilize across departments to best engage the public as effectively as possible. The intent of this Plan is that it will be a living document, improved as needed, to establish a strong culture of public involvement in Big Rapids that will persist despite municipal turnover.

Goals

The City of Big Rapids strives to involve the entire community as key stakeholders in the future development of the City. The following goals are aspirational statements that the City hopes to achieve through utilization of the Public Participation Plan.

- The City of Big Rapids seeks representative involvement of all residents of the community.
- The City of Big Rapids engages citizens in a transparent manner, making information easy to access for all interested members of the community.
- The City of Big Rapids seeks creative ways to involve a diverse set of community stakeholders in decision making.
- The City of Big Rapids provides educational materials and designs participation initiatives that will support and encourage effective participation.
- The City of Big Rapids utilizes effective and equitable avenues for distributing information and receiving comments.
- The City of Big Rapids uses comments and information received from interested members of the community to make decisions regarding planning, land use, and future development.
- The City of Big Rapids solicits public participation in each phase of planning processes.
- The City of Big Rapids tracks and analyzes the results of all public participation to the extent feasible and provides the public with a summary.
- The City of Big Rapids supports and encourages continuous improvement in the methods used to meet the public need for information and involvement.
- The City of Big Rapids maintains and develops staff expertise in all aspects of participation.
- The City of Big Rapids encourages developers to engage the community, seeking input from the community toward future development projects.

State Regulations on Public Participation

Along with the desire to include a diverse public in its planning processes, the City of Big Rapids relies on the local and state regulations listed below to guide participation activities. These regulations include provisions for the public review process, public participation, and public hearings:



- City of Big Rapids Charter
- City of Big Rapids Code of Ordinances
- Michigan Open Meetings Act (PA 267 of 1976, as amended)
- Michigan Planning Enabling Act (PA 33 of 2008, as amended)
- Michigan Zoning Enabling Act (PA 110 of 2006, as amended)
- Home Rule City Act (PA 279 of 1909, as amended)
- Brownfield Redevelopment Financing Act (PA 381 of 1996, as amended)
- Downtown Development Authority Act (PA 197 of 1975, as amended)
- Plant Rehabilitation and Industrial Development Districts Act (PA 198 of 1974, as amended)
- Recodified Tax Increment Financing Act (PA 57 of 2018, as amended)
- Other applicable local, state, and federal regulations



Key Stakeholders in the City of Big Rapids

A list of groups that are able to assist in and enhance the public participation process has been identified, including groups that are often not at the visioning table. During preparation for each public event, the list will be reviewed in order to make sure that the appropriate people and groups are involved. Since groups are constantly changing, this list serves as a reference to build upon for each event. Possible key stakeholder groups include, but are not limited to:

- City Commission
- City Boards and Commissions
- City Residents and Property Owners
- Big Rapids Property Owner's Association
- Big Rapids Public Schools
- Crossroads Charter Academy
- St. Mary's School and St. Peter's School
- Mecosta-Osceola Intermediate School District
- Ferris State University
- Downtown Business Association
- Downtown Development Authority
- Mecosta County Development Corporation
- Mecosta County Area Chamber of Commerce
- Mecosta County Convention and Visitor's Bureau
- Mecosta County Emergency Management
- Spectrum Health Big Rapids Hospital
- Nursing homes and adult foster care homes
- Good Neighbors Association
- Big Rapids Charter Township
- Green Township
- West Michigan Regional Planning Commission
- Potential investors and developers
- Public employees
- Major local employers
- Civic and social organizations
- Students and student groups
- Religious groups
- Environmental groups
- Real estate professionals
- Relevant state agencies

Big Rapids has many active residents who strive to make their community better. However, the City is always trying to get more residents and property owners involved. The City will use various methods of communication to attempt to reach a variety of audiences.



Communication Toolbox

The City of Big Rapids has a tool box that includes “tried and true” methods as well as creative, new methods of communicating with the public. City staff work together to evaluate innovative new opportunities, test out technological solutions, and promote new media communication, with the goal of improving resident outreach.

The City will always attempt to use more than one tool or method, depending on the specific project or target audience. The following are some methods which may be used to reach the appropriate level of public participation for various City projects or events:

Inform – To provide information and assist public understanding. See also the City Information Distribution Policy.

- Website: www.cityofbr.org is a central host site for calendar of meetings, posting of agendas and minutes, and sometimes will contain pages or links for topics of major interest
- Newspaper: The Pioneer Newspaper is the primary City of Big Rapids’ newspaper and the Ferris State Torch is the University’s student newspaper.
- Manager’s Newsletter: The City Manager releases a weekly newsletter compiling news, projects, and statistics regarding City business. It is accessible via the City website.
- Printed Postings: Available for viewing at the City Hall on posting boards both inside and outside the building.
- Announcements: Announcements during meetings of the City Commission, Planning Commission, and other boards and commissions.
- Press Releases and Articles: At various times, the City will issue press releases and information for articles to various newspapers and TV and radio stations.
- Email or Postal Mail: Interested parties may make a request of the City Clerk for personal notification of meetings or topics for discussion as well as postal mailings to neighbors within 300 feet of new developments, according to statute.



Consult – To obtain public feedback.

- Social Media: The City currently uses Facebook to announce City news such as holiday hours, street maintenance, etc. and may also use Facebook to notify the community of meetings.
- Surveys: Utilizing online and paper surveys allows for the collection of large amounts of data and opinions from the public.
- Public Hearings: Public attendance at meetings is strongly encouraged and allows for an appropriate venue for public input.

Involve – To work directly with the public throughout the process.

- Open Houses: In order to facilitate two-way communication, the City will hold open house events for projects and initiatives as needed.
- Community Workshops: Issues that require community feedback can benefit from a noticed workshop.
- Charrettes: Design charrettes and information gathering sessions allow a larger group of people to participate in a community engagement activity related to a particular site.

Collaborate – To partner with public in each aspect of decision making.

- Advisory Committees: The City uses advisory committees for specialized aspects of our community to enhance collaboration between city staff and the public.
- Focus Groups: Bringing together stakeholders to discuss and brainstorm decision making options.

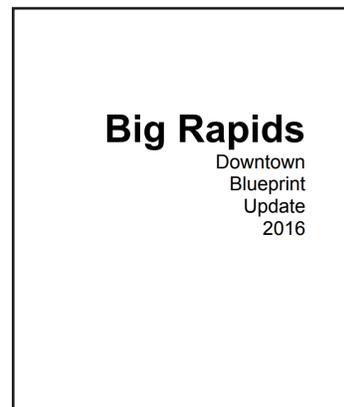
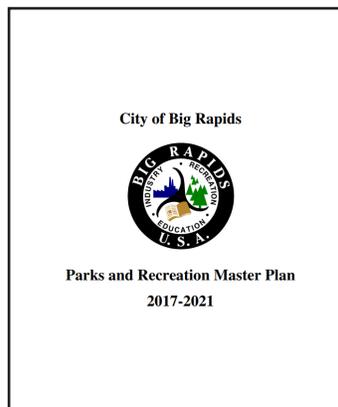
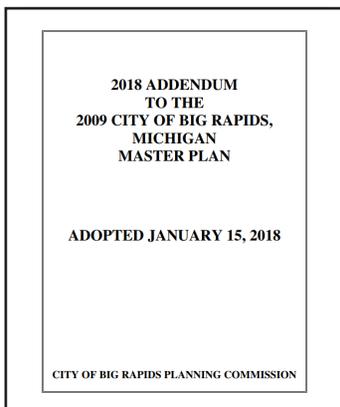
The City of Big Rapids is committed to implementing a variety of communication strategies, believing that the overall quality of plans and development of the community is improved with greater stakeholder involvement.

Opportunities for Public Participation

The City of Big Rapids engages in many different efforts where public participation is desired and vital to the process. The following is a list of examples of efforts that should include public participation:

- Master Plan Update
- Zoning Ordinance Update
- Downtown Development Plan
- Parks and Recreation Plan
- Policy Development/Decision-Making
- Major Development Project Review

For each project, the City will formulate a project-specific public participation plan, following the outline provided in Appendix A. This will allow the City to address each unique project specifically to identify participation goals and key stakeholders, select which tools apply in the situation, create a schedule, assign responsibilities, and engage the public with intention.



Communicating Results

The City of Big Rapids will publicly communicate results of community input, utilizing one or more of the “Inform” methods to relay results back to the public. The goal of reporting back to the public is to demonstrate that comments were heard and valued, that public input is desired, and that the City is committed to a transparent process.

Communicating the information gathered in public participation efforts may look different for each method and project. Efforts will be made to release results immediately following a public input session to publish how many people attended and solicit further participation for future meetings. Public input gathered at public meetings is documented in meeting minutes and will be available on the City website.

Results from public participation sessions related to specific plans will be communicated back to the public by including results in the final plan document. Results from one-on-one interviews or small focus groups may be kept confidential for the comfort of participants.

Public Participation Evaluation

Public participation, when properly executed, builds community consensus and strengthens sense of place. Creating a culture of collaborative visioning enriches democracy by allowing citizens to voice their ideas, not just their complaints. This plan is to be used and reviewed as a daily guide to best incorporate the public into decisions that affect their space.

A City official will be responsible for keeping records of participation efforts and will be responsible for compiling the data and presenting it to the City and public with suggestions for improvements. The results should identify strengths and weaknesses and give examples of how to adjust behaviors to better maximize outreach. The intent is to create a continuous review process that enables the City to successfully make changes through a consistently improving, dynamic process.

The City of Big Rapids understands that the Public Participation Plan, like all such planning documents, will need to be reviewed and updated on a routine basis. This plan will be updated as needed, at a minimum of every five (5) years. Updates to this plan will be drafted by staff, reviewed and recommended by the Planning Commission, and approved through the City Commission.



Appendix A - Project-Specific Public Participation Plan Outline

Project-Specific Public Participation Plan Outline

1. Describe the project
2. Assess level of public concern or interest
3. Determine level of public concern or interest
4. Identify public participation goals
5. Identify stakeholders
6. Select tools
7. Create a schedule
8. Identify roles and responsibilities
9. Hold the public participation event/s
10. Compile and disseminate input and results
11. Evaluate effectiveness

Appendix B - Community Event Satisfaction Survey

<u>Community Event Satisfaction Survey</u>		
1) What event did you attend?		
2) How did you hear about this event?		
City Website	City Posting	Facebook
The Pioneer	Other: _____	
3) Was this event held at a convenient location and time?		
Yes	No.	
If no, what would be better?		
4) Are you glad you came to this event?		
Yes	No.	
5) What is one thing that could be done to improve the event?		

Appendix C - Internal Public Participation Evaluation

<u>Internal Public Participation Evaluation</u>
1) What project was undertaken?
2) What was the date, time, and location of the event?
3) What types of public participation were utilized?
<i>Inform</i> : website, newspaper, newsletter, postings, press releases, mailings, other:
<i>Consult</i> : social media, surveys, public hearings, other:
<i>Involve</i> : open house, community workshop, charrette, other:
<i>Collaborate</i> : advisory committee, focus group, other:
4) How was the event advertised?
5) How many people attended? Was any group under-represented? Over-represented?
6) Who facilitated this event?
7) In what ways could the event have been improved?

Appendix D

Social Media Moderation Guidelines

The City of Big Rapids' social media accounts are intended to serve as a way in which the community can connect and learn about City services, events, and activities. Comments and questions are encouraged, but remember that this is a moderated online discussion site. The City actively monitors this page and takes your input seriously.

You are fully responsible for everything that you submit in your comments, and all posted comments are in the public domain. Everyone is encouraged to be respectful and thoughtful in their participation.

The City of Big Rapids reserves the right to remove and/or block anyone who posts inappropriate material and to delete comments that are generally understood as any of the following:

- Promotion, fostering, or perpetuation of discrimination on the basis of gender, race, creed, color, national origin or ancestry, age, disability, lawful source of income, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, past or present membership in military service, or familial status;
- Profane, obscene, violent, or pornographic in language or content;
- Unlawful defamation or attack an individual or group;
- Direct or indirect threats against any person or organization;
- Support or opposition for a political campaign or a ballot measure;
- Advertisement for a personal or private business or endeavor;
- Promotion or endorsement of a specific financial or commercial entity;
- Defrauding or defamation of any financial, commercial, or non-governmental agency;
- Violation of any federal, state, or local law or encourage any illegal activity;
- Violation of any existing copyrights, trade secrets, or legal ownerships;
- Compromising the safety and/or security of the public or public systems; or
- Are unrelated to the original topic.

A posting on City of Big Rapids social media accounts constitutes acceptance of these terms.

Please note that the comments expressed on this site do not reflect the opinions and position of the City of Big Rapids or its officers and employees.

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