

PLAN ELEMENT XII: PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Community Outreach

The vision of this plan is “to strengthen and focus this community’s commitment to improve the lives of all its people.” Improving the lives of all Rockfordians will take the contribution of Rockfordians. However, not all citizens have the means or desire to participate. Often times, these are the people whose opinions are most valuable to the planning process. The City will stay committed to involving as many people as possible in the planning process and ensuring that these people are a diverse group representing the demographics of Rockford.

1. **Public Meetings.** In April and May of 2002, 7 public meetings were held at various community locations to present the initial draft of the 2020 Plan. These meetings centered on a set of discussion questions asking how, when and with what resources development should occur. The public input was analyzed and incorporated into the Plan where possible.

2. **Website.** The executive summary was posted on the City of Rockford’s website for public review. Elements of the final Draft Plan will be posted on the website as they are completed for public review. The final 2020 Comprehensive Plan will also be posted on the website after adoption for public access. As the neighborhood plans are created, the website will once again be used to try to reach residents who do not often get involved in the planning process. The website planning process participation would aim at:



- ▶ Youth,
- ▶ People unable to attend public meetings for a variety of reasons,
- ▶ People who attend public meetings but would like to participate more or keep up-to-date on the latest progressions of the plan.

The website could also be used as an evaluation tool for the 220 Plan as well as other plans. Public comment can be given through the website, surveys could be conducted and general information could be given. Evaluation is scheduled annually. These evaluations will also be posted on the website.

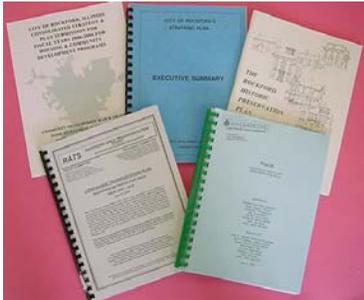
3. **Community Q&A Day.** Before the official public hearing for the Plan takes place, the City will host a community Q&A day. The meeting will be scheduled once all elements of the final Draft Plan have been posted on the city website and after an adequate amount of time for the public to access and review the documents. At the community Q&A day, staff members will be available to the public to sit down and discuss the plan one on one with community members. The public can ask questions and make comments. This will allow all members of the community to speak face-to-face with a Planning Department staff member so that there will be no misunderstandings after the plan has been adopted. If this is successful, a similar approach can be used for other planning processes in the future.

Consensus Building

The City of Rockford has 10 departments, a 14-member City Council broken into 3 standing committees, and works with numerous organizations on various tasks. Managing so many stakeholders takes coordination and consensus building. It is also important to have the support of the City as a whole, and goals that the whole city can benefit from. Once again, creating consensus throughout the city can be quite difficult as everyone has different personal goals, needs and wants. Whenever possible, the City will implement goals, programs and activities that are decided by consensus rather than majority rule. Although the consensus building process can be difficult and time consuming, the City will encourage the use of consensus building in its decision making.

1. **Neighborhood Plans.** The Healthy Neighborhoods Planning Program has a goal of creating 1-2

neighborhood plans each year. These plans will be a more strategic approach specific to a single neighborhood than the broad comprehensive plan. Citizens are often more likely to get involved in local planning than comprehensive planning. The issues seem more relevant, neighborhood plans are implemented in a shorter amount of time and people feel that they are more affected by their local environment. The neighborhood plans can be used as a tool to engage the community in the planning process. *You can read more about this program in the Neighborhoods section of the 2020 Plan.*



2. Existing Plans. In creating the 2020 Plan, all current plans and ordinances were consulted. This was done to ensure there would be no conflict of goals. After adoption, the 2020 Plan will serve as a guide for all other planning endeavors. The goals and strategies set forth in the Plan will set the fundament for other plans, programs and activities. This will ensure that City activities will be working in the same direction to the same end and will not overlap or conflict. When any new plan is undertaken, preexisting plans pertaining to that topic area as well as current plans affecting the new one will be consulted.

3. Interdepartmental Involvement. Each section of the plan calls on various departments to get involved. Since they are the ones that will implement the Plan, their involvement is critical. It will also be actively sought out during the creation of other plans, programs and strategies.

4. Round Table Discussion. A well-known consensus building process is the round table discussion. It provides a way for stakeholders of a certain issue to sit together and discuss without finger pointing or name calling. It allows people to sit as equals, giving no stakeholder the advantage of power. A round table discussion could be used during the creation of certain plans. It could also be used for certain topic areas that have a lot of stakeholders that are not communicating and cooperating as well as they should. Some of these topics could include, but are not limited to; neighborhoods, affordable housing, downtown or homelessness.

Public Education

Educating the public on planning trends and issues is very important in the healthy development of the City of Rockford. There are two major reasons for public education. The first is that planning is a complex and complicated field. To this day, it often has controversy surrounding it. Only through better understanding can “plan” transform from a four-letter word to a tool to make Rockford a better place to live, work and play. The second reason is that involving the public in planning and City government in general first requires a knowledgeable public. Knowing and understanding best practices, options to traditional development, and other communities successes and failures can help the City and public make better decisions.

1. Neighborhood Academy. The Neighborhood Academy’s purpose is to bring neighborhood leaders and residents together to learn more about how to better their communities. The academy would meet in a community space and have courses geared to neighborhood improvement and family issues. *You can read more about the Neighborhood Academy in the Neighborhoods section of the 2020 Plan.*

2. Plans. What is a comprehensive plan? What does it do? How does it affect Rockford? Not everyone knows the answers to these questions. However, it is important that Rockfordians are able to answer these questions before they delve into the 2020 Plan. Included in the 2020 Plan are two sections that try to answer the above questions — the “Introduction” and the “Why a 2020 Plan?” sections. These sections are included in the beginning of the 2020 Plan to try to inform readers what the comprehensive plan is all about. Also, when posted on the website, there will be a brief explanation of what the 2020 Plan is and how it affects Rockford.

This model will be applied to other plans as they are written. It is important to first identify why the plan is

being written to gain support from City Council and citizens. Secondly, it is important to educate the public on plans because they can have a positive impact on the City and strengthen the relationship between the City and its citizens.

3. ***Evaluation of the 2020 Plan.*** The 2020 Plan will have annual evaluations to determine how the Plan is being implemented, how it is affecting the City and find adjustments that need to be made. These evaluations will be made available to the public along with explanations of what the evaluations mean. These evaluations will help to show the community that the City does implement the plans that are created and that they are intended to serve the City of Rockford. *You can learn more about the evaluation of the 2020 Plan in the Monitoring and Evaluation section of the 2020 Plan.*

Public Participation Implementation Matrix

Goal	Objective	Action	Who	When
Community Outreach	Involve entire community including: youth & schools, special needs and organizations	Hold a community Q&A Day where the public can speak with staff about the 2020 Plan. Use this model for other plans that are created	Community Development	Immediate
		Public Hearings	Community Development	Immediate
		Update the CD Department website to give up-to-date information and ways to participate	Community Development	Ongoing
		Hold a youth charatte during the creation of neighborhood plans or as a 'community activity'	Community Development, Schools	Immediate
		Neighborhood Planning Process	Community Development, Human Services	Ongoing
Consensus Building	Build City Consensus	Involve all departments in relevant planning activities	All City Departments	Ongoing
		Review all existing plans/ programs/activities when preparing new ones	All City Departments	Ongoing
	Build Community Consensus	Healthy Neighborhoods Planning Program	Community Development, Human Services, Public Works, Police, Fire, Neighborhood Organizations, Citizens	Ongoing
Public Education	Educate the general public	Create Neighborhood EKGs and provide data to the general public and neighborhood organizations	CD Department, Public Works, Human Services	Immediate
		Use the proposed Neighborhood Academy to educate the public on the City's planning efforts	CD Department, Public Works, Neighborhood Organizations, Human Services, Police	Short term
		Update the public on the status of implementing various plans	CD Department	Ongoing
		Update the CD Department's website	CD Department	Ongoing
	Educate youth	Encourage planning education in schools, hold a "planner's day"	CD Department, Schools	Immediate
		Conduct a youth charette	CD Department, Schools	Immediate
		Create a teen council	CD Department, Schools, Mayor's Office	Short term
	Educate City Council and Committees	Update the City Council and Committees on the status of implementing various plans	CD Department	Ongoing

