



Community Participation Plan

**For More Information Visit the
City of Ionia Website at
www.cityofionia.org**

A letter from the Mayor

The City of Ionia has some of the most beautiful, historic building stock in the State of Michigan, has a renovated downtown business district that evokes memories of Ionia's historic past, has a modernized industrial center featuring light, medium, and heavy manufacturing, and has some of the friendliest citizens in America. I hope that you are able to take time to enjoy Ionia's scenic beauty, and to experience the variety and history of one of Michigan's best kept secrets. Ionia is nestled in the heart of the Grand River Valley, and is, as most people know, the home of Michigan's greatest outdoor event – the Ionia Free Fair.

The history and scenic beauty of Ionia are unparalleled, from the beautiful County Courthouse and Community Library, which are both built of Ionia sandstone, to Ionia's red brick Main Street, Italianate homes, bike trails, park system, and the one-of-a-kind, fully restored Ionia Theatre, which is beautifully maintained in the Art Deco style and hosts over 50,000 people per year for first run movies, live shows, and meetings. The University of Michigan Health, formerly Sparrow, Ionia Hospital is a state of the art, critical access hospital, the Ionia Educational Center, public schools, and parochial schools provide an outstanding educational experience for Ionia's youth, and the Ionia Parks and Recreation Department has programs and activities for all ages, interests, and skill levels. In short, we often say in Ionia that we are "proud of our past and confident of our future," and I am certain that once you take the time to look us over and experience the many things that Ionia has to offer, you will understand why we take such great pride in our community.



John R. Milewski, II
Mayor, City of Ionia



Overview and Purpose

Engaging citizens through a planning process is crucial to the success of this 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 of Ionia officials enhances the public's understanding of its ability and responsibility to affect the future of the community. As key facilitators in the City's decision-making process, public officials and administrators of the City of Ionia understand the significance of public participation.

In order to effectively engage the public, there needs to be an explicit plan of action that outlines the purpose and process used in soliciting input from the public. Creating a public participation plan allows 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 Ionia will be able to assess its efforts and adjust accordingly, thereby creating a dynamic and effective set of best practices it may consult for future uses more objectively.

The City of Ionia has developed this document to help guide decisions for formulating public information gathering processes during planning and development projects and the application of best practices. This document contains a series of procedures for public involvement and outreach for tasks such as: Master Plan updates, Parks and Recreation Plan updates, major development projects, (planned unit developments, special land uses, or other), and development projects involving public-owned properties.

Public engagement is 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.

The City considers new methods of communication and engagement as they become available and updates this guide as needed. The public participation actions described throughout this guide do not preclude additional public involvement or engagement efforts. In circumstances when the City consults with a third-party entity, it shall also adhere to the provisions of this guide, as applicable.

Public Participation Goals

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

The list below contains the goals that the City of Ionia seeks to accomplish through application of this guide.

1. Solicit proactive and inclusionary public participation techniques in key phases of the master planning and comprehensive planning process.
2. Seek broad representation involvement, particularly by low- and moderate-income persons, and utilize effective and equitable avenues for distributing information and receiving comments.
3. Conduct all aspects of citizen participation in an open and timely manner, with freedom of access to the participation process for all interested parties.

4. Ensure residents are provided reasonable and timely access to local meetings, consistent with accessibility and reasonable accommodation requirements.
5. Foster a cycle of seeking public input and public review of results.
6. Provide educational materials and design participation initiatives that will support and encourage effective participation.
7. Maintain and develop staff expertise in all aspects of participation.
8. Support and encourage continuous improvement in the methods used to meet the public need for information and involvement.
9. Record results of public engagement and provide a summary of the results for public review.
10. Encourage developers to engage the community.

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 that serve at its pleasure, follows the local, state, and federal regulations listed below. These regulations include provisions for the public review process, public participation, and public hearings.

- The Michigan Open Meeting Act (P.A. 267 of 1976 as amended)
- Downtown Development Authority Act (P.A. 57 of 2018 as amended)
- Brownfield Redevelopment Financing Act (P.A. 381 of 1996 as amended)
- The City of Ionia Charter
- The City of Ionia Codified Ordinances
- Michigan Zoning Enabling Act (P.A. 110 of 2006 as amended)
- Michigan Planning Enabling Act (PA33 of 2008)
- Other relevant State and Federal legislation, especially with regard to accessibility, such as Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the regulations at 24 CFR part 8, and the Americans with Disabilities Act and regulations at 28 CFR parts 35 and 36.

Key Stakeholders

Stakeholders represent a diverse set of individuals, groups, and organizations that 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, depending on the nature of the project or plan, level of community interest, and the potential impact of the project.

People and 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 Boards and Commissions
- Ionia Area Chamber of Commerce
- Residents
- Commercial and industrial business owners
- Ionia Public Schools
- Community organizations

- Taxing jurisdictions
- Neighboring municipalities and townships
- Senior citizens
- Public employees
- Students
- Young professionals
- Ionia County
- Major local employers
- Neighborhood groups
- Potential investors and developers
- Real estate professionals
- Other relevant stakeholders

The City of Ionia is dedicated to ensuring the public is notified and involved in its decision-making processes. More effort is needed to reach beyond the public meetings 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. 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 Ionia, the likelihood of underrepresented citizens and organizations is still a reality. The City of Ionia works to identify these stakeholders and makes a concerted effort at bringing them into the decision-making process.

Opportunities for Public Participation

The City provides Ionia residents and stakeholders with numerous opportunities to join in the planning, review, and approval process for many projects and initiatives.

Development Review Bodies

City Council. The City Council serves as the legislative body of the City and is responsible for setting policy and approving the annual budget. The Mayor serves a term of four years and is elected on an at-large basis. The Mayor is responsible for recommending individuals to serve on the various boards and commissions of the City. The Mayor presides over meetings of the City Council and is a member of the City Council with a vote. Excluding the Mayor, there are eight City Council members, with two elected from each of the City of Ionia's four wards for four-year terms. The City Council selects one of its members to serve as Deputy Mayor who, if a mayoral vacancy occurs, becomes Mayor for the remainder of the unexpired term.

Regular Meetings of City Council are held on the first Wednesday of each month at 6:30 PM at City Hall, 114 N. Kidd Street. Typically, the April meeting is scheduled for the second Wednesday of the month due to Ionia Public Schools' Spring Break. Review the City Calendar on the City's website to confirm exact meeting dates and times.

Boards and Commissions. The City encourages citizen participation in local governmental 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 Ionia – 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 they undertake projects, deliberate on issues, and host special events. The City Council is responsible for making final decisions on most topics or issues, 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 City Council as official recommendations.

The most relevant authorities and commissions in the City of Ionia for the planning and development review process are as follows:

- Brownfield Redevelopment Authority (BRA)
- Downtown Development Authority (DDA)
- Planning Commission
- Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA)

The City encourages community members interested in serving their community through active civic engagement to apply for openings on these Boards and Commissions. Visit the City of Ionia website for a complete list of Boards and Commissions in the City and their responsibilities.

It should be noted that the City's Authorities and Commissions meet regularly and provide additional opportunities for public participation in the planning and development review process. These are public meetings that allow for public comments from any interested stakeholder.

[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. 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. Approved meeting minutes, which include the outcome of the public participation, are made available to the public by being posted on the City's website.

Public Hearings

The City Council and its various Boards and Commissions will hold public hearings when required by local code and State enabling legislation, or when otherwise prudent, to provide the opportunity for public comment on specific topics.

Ionia Planning Commission: Meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month at 4:30 PM at City Hall, 114 N. Kidd Street. The City of Ionia Planning Commission is comprised of seven members appointed by the Mayor and confirmed by City Council. One Commissioner serves as an ex-officio member from City Council with full voting rights and one may be a non-resident. The other members are residents of the City of Ionia interested in serving their community and come from varying professional backgrounds. Appointed members serve a three-year term.

The responsibilities of the Planning Commission include:

- To make and adopt a comprehensive development plan for the future, physical development of the City.
- To divide the City into zoning districts or “zones” and recommend appropriate regulations for these zones.
- To make recommendations to the City Council, to public officials, and to citizens regarding all matters relating to the planning and development of the City.

Ionia City Council: The City Council holds public hearings when necessitated by local code and/or state statute. After receiving a recommendation by the Planning Commission, the City Council sets a date for a public hearing to consider any proposed zoning ordinance update or rezoning. State statute requires 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 Council public hearing. Public hearing notifications are also sent by mail to the applicant, the owner of subject property, and the owners of property within 300 feet of the subject property.

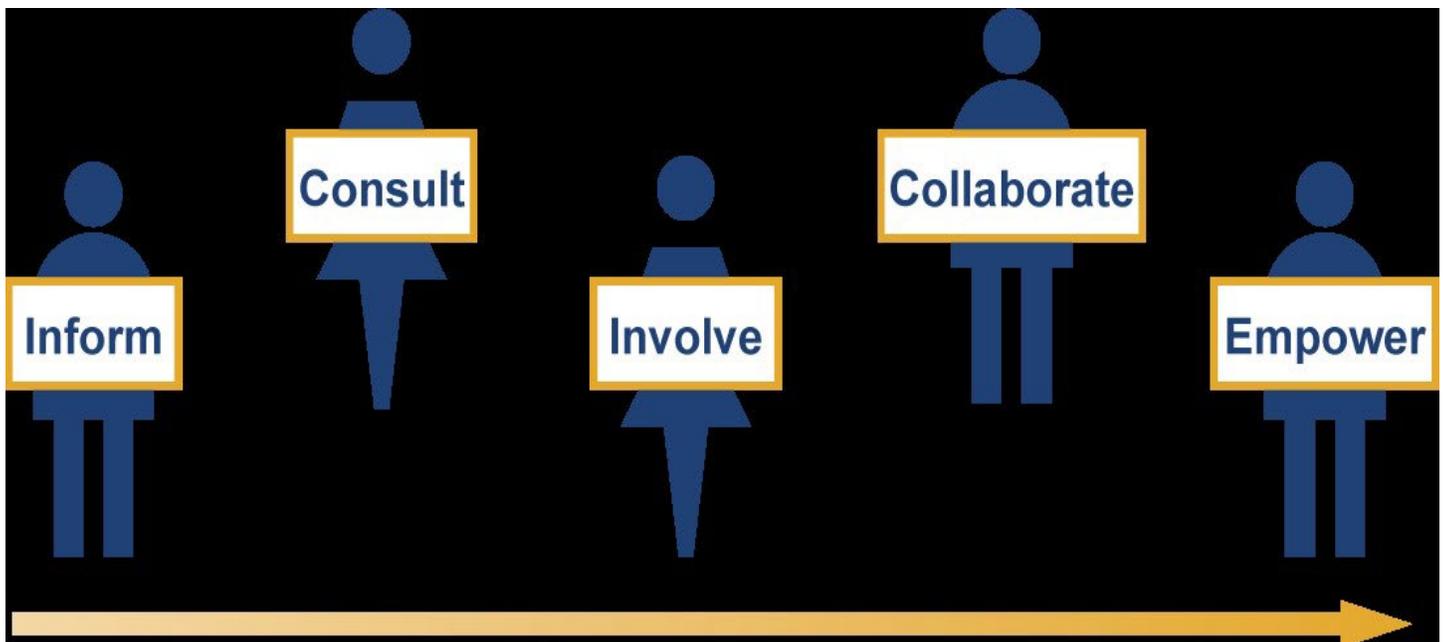
Other Boards and Commissions: Other relevant boards and commissions hold public hearings as needed or as required by code or state statute. Public hearings are noticed as required in advance of the meeting.

CDBG Grant Projects

With specific regard to citizen participation and CDBG grant projects, the City shall ensure:

1. Citizen participation is encouraged, particularly by low- and moderate-income persons who resident in blighted areas of the City in which funds are proposed to be used.
2. Residents are given reasonable and timely access to local meetings, consistent with accessibility and reasonable accommodation requirements in accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the regulations at 24 CFR part 8, and the Americans with Disabilities Act and the regulations at 28 CFR parts 35 and 36, as applicable, as well as information and records relating to the unit of local government's proposed and actual use of CDBG funds.
3. Citizens are furnished information, including but not limited to:
 - a. The amount of CDBG funds expected to be made available for the current fiscal year (including the grant and anticipated program income);
 - b. The range of activities that may be undertaken with the CDBG funds;
 - c. The estimated amount of the CDBG funds proposed to be used for activities that will meet the national objective of benefit to low- and moderate-income persons; and

- d. The proposed CDBG activities likely to result in displacement and the unit of general local government's anti-displacement and relocation plans required under §570.488.
4. Technical assistance is provided to groups that are representative of persons of low- and moderate-income that request assistance in developing proposals (including proposed strategies and actions to affirmatively further fair housing) in accordance with the procedures developed by the State. Such assistance need not include providing funds to such groups.
 5. A minimum of two public hearings are provided for the purpose of obtaining residents' views and responding to proposals and questions. The first public hearing must be held prior to application submission to the CDBG granting agency and the second near the end of the grant term. Together the hearings must cover housing needs (including affirmatively furthering fair housing), development of proposed activities, and a review of program performance. There must be reasonable notice of the hearings [at least 5 days] and they must be held at times and accessible locations convenient to potential or actual beneficiaries, with accommodations for persons with disabilities. Public hearings shall be conducted in a manner to meet the needs of non-English speaking residents where a significant number of non-English speaking residents can reasonably be expected to participate. If 51% of the expected participants are non-English speaking, the hearings will be advertised in a non-English publication available to those residents. A person fluent in the non-English language must be available at the public hearing.
 6. Citizens are provided with reasonable advance notice of, and an opportunity to comment on proposed activities in an application to the State. For grants already made, activities that are proposed to be added, deleted or substantially changed from the unit of general local government's application to the State. Substantially changed means changes made in terms of purpose, scope, location or beneficiaries as defined by criteria established by the State.
 7. Citizens are provided with the address, phone number, and times for submitting complaints and grievances, and provide timely written answers to written complaints and grievances, within 15 working days where practicable.



Planning and Development Review Processes

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 situation.

Master Plan Updates

As the visionary policy document for future development in the City, the master planning process uses a wide range of public input methods to develop the goals, objectives and strategies for implementation. The City of Ionia follows, 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 an update to the Master Plan.

The Planning Commission sends a notice to all stakeholders as listed in the State enabling legislation; the notice explains that the Planning Commission intends to prepare a plan and request cooperation and comment on the plan. The Planning Commission and the City then begins work on drafting or updating the plan. Public input is solicited through many of the methods listed in the section 'Community Engagement and Outreach Strategies', including, but not limited to surveys, open houses, community meetings, and website updates. The City encourages 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, results of such public participation are made available to the community and incorporated as much as possible in the drafted plan or plan amendment.

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

Upon completion, the Planning Commission submits the proposed plan to the City Council for review and comment. The process of adopting the Master Plan will not proceed further unless the City Council approves distribution of the proposed plan. The City Council acts on the proposed plan during a public meeting held in accordance with the Open Meetings Act. The City Council decides on 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 will notify the Planning Commission, and the Planning Commission will submit the proposed plan to these entities for review and comments, as required by state statute. 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 case of a Master Plan update).

Before approving the proposed Master Plan, the Planning Commission will hold not less than one (1) public hearing on the proposed plan. The hearing will be held after the expiration of the deadline for comment. The Planning Commission will give notice of the time and place of the public hearing not less than 15 days before the hearing by publication in a newspaper circulation within Ionia.

The proposed plan will 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, will be included on the inside of the front or

back cover of the Master Plan document. Following Planning Commission approval of the proposed Master Plan, the secretary of the Planning Commission will submit a copy of the plan to City Council for final approval. City Council will either approve or reject the proposed plan. If the City Council rejects the proposed Master Plan, a statement of its objections will be submitted to the Planning Commission. The Planning Commission will consider the objections and revise the proposed plan. The previously described approval process will be repeated until City Council approval is received. Once approved by City Council, a statement recording the City Council's approval of the Master Plan, signed by the City Clerk, will be included on the inside front or back cover of the Master Plan.

Zoning Ordinance Updates

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 may be utilized when tackling more complicated issues.

The City Council may of its own motion or 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 will 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 approve, 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, is filed with the City Council, the rezoning ordinance will 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 Ionia within 15 days of adoption. The ordinance will take effect upon the expiration of seven days after its publication, unless a later effective date is specified by 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 will be paid to public outreach and communication when dealing with controversial zoning ordinance amendments or controversial development proposals. The website will be updated regularly on decision making processes and projects.

Capital Improvement Program Planning

A capital improvement program (CIP) plan is a short-range plan, typically four to ten years (the City of Ionia has a six-year CIP), 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 expense for the project. The City of Ionia is committed to working with stakeholders such as utility companies, Ionia Public Schools, and other departments to make the best use of public funds. While planning for capital improvements can largely be very technical and difficult to engage the public in, City Council holds a public hearing prior to adoption of the CIP plan and posts the plan in an easily accessible location on the City's website for the public to view.

Major Developments

The City will 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 Council and its boards and commissions will hold public hearings, noticed in accordance with the State legislation, and allow for public comment on the purposed development project during its regular meetings. Depending on the nature of the project, the community interest, and community's financial involvement, additional methods of engagement may be used to gather community feedback.

The Development of Publicly Owned Properties

On occasion, the City Council or the Ionia Downtown Development Authority (DDA) may find it beneficial to seek development partners in order to pursue redevelopment of parcels owned by the City of DDA. The development review process may vary based upon the scale and scope of the intended project. The following strategies may be employed in the development process; public participation is always encouraged.

In general, the Downtown Development Authority will issue a Request for Qualifications and/or Proposals (RFQ/P) with the intent to initiate and implement a redevelopment project affecting one or more publicly owned parcels in the City or downtown. For projects of great significance, the City or DDA may wish to gather the opinion of the community with regard to the vision, redevelopment scale and character, and uses of the parcels under consideration.

The appropriate board may organize a review team representing a variety of stakeholders to evaluate the received proposals in response to the RFQ/P. The review team meetings may be open to the public. The review team will recommend a certain number of firms to the appropriate board for further consideration. The board may hold a public hearing to select a development firm to further pursue the proposed project for the sites under consideration. The appropriate board will act upon the resolution selecting a firm as a posted agenda item during a public meeting.

Pursuant to the selection of a development partner, the appropriate board will review and enter into a predevelopment agreement. The pre-development agreement outlines the terms of the due diligence phase of

the project, which may include public charrettes, market analysis, design work, financial structure development, detailed financial pro-forma development, boards and commissions review, etc. At the end of the due diligence period, if a project is deemed feasible, a full development agreement is negotiated. The development agreement is approved during a City Council and/or Authority's public meeting.

Community Engagement and Outreach Strategies

The following methods may be used to gather the community's input on specific development proposals or the community vision for the Master Plan and other planning and zoning documents. The City may use these various activities to provide additional opportunities for citizens, public interest groups, or other stakeholders to directly participate in the development review process or the creation/amendment of plans and strategies.

The City shall communicate the results of the public participation methods in a consistent and transparent manner through the appropriate avenues of communication listed previously. More than one method of communication may be used in order to reach a broader audience and the affected persons. Those responsible for organizing the specific community engagement activity may also coordinate the communication of public participation outcomes. The results of any of the methods of engagement and outreach will be included in the report or plan generated based on the information collected during these meetings and support the development review process.

Basic Announcement Methods for Public Meetings

The following methods are used, when possible, 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 in City Hall
- Announcements at Council meetings
- Direct e-mail to residents signed up for contact from the City

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. The 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 successful with strong partnerships with stakeholders.

Pre-application Coordination. Prior to submitting an application, or site plan, an applicant may choose to submit a sketch plan or draft plan for review by the Zoning Administrator and/or Planning Commission. The review may be informal and advisory only and may not constitute any form of approval or authorization of granting any type

of permit. The review will be done without cost to the applicant and will be scheduled as an item of business on the Planning Commission's agenda.

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. 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.

Charrettes/Design Workshops. 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.

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 and gather perspectives and interests in one setting.

Digital Tools of Communication. Depending on the type of project, information should be incorporated into online services. 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 following table 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
Pre-application meetings					Recommended
Surveys	Recommended	Optional	Recommended	Recommended	
Open House Meetings and Communication Workshops	Recommended	Optional	Recommended	Recommended	Optional
Charrettes/Design Workshops	Optional			Optional	Optional
Walking Tours	Optional	Optional	Optional	Optional	Optional
One-on-One Interviews	Optional	Optional	Optional	Optional	Optional
Focus Groups	Optional	Optional	Optional	Optional	Optional
Digital Tools of Communication	Recommended	Optional	Optional	Recommended	Recommended

Monitoring and Evaluating Outreach Efforts

The purpose of this section is to ensure the City in maintaining a presence within the general community and providing stakeholders many and different methods to participate in City decision making. Additionally, to ensure the methods of outreach are relevant and being utilized on a regular basis.

Tracking Success of Outreach Efforts

The City should take steps to track and record participation. In regard to open meetings, the participation of interested persons and their input shall be recorded in the 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. The success of public participation during public meetings can be measured by counting the number of public comments received at each meeting, the number of comments received by the City Clerk outside of meeting times, and the number of viewings the recorded meeting registers. The City will track the rates of participation over time.

Public participation during City events, special planning meetings, and general outreach can also be tracked. For group meetings such as steering committees, focus groups, and community workshops, attendance and number of comments may be tracked. Surveys distributed via paper form, mail, or electronically may be tracked by their responsive rate. The City may conduct regular surveys that allow response rates to be compared from year to year in addition to survey results.

Communicating Outreach Effort Results

The City strives to be consistent and transparent with information. The City's website is the primary source of information including meeting schedules, agendas, and minutes. Additionally, the City may periodically report a summary of special meetings or other related planning and development efforts.

Evaluation

The City of Ionia will review this Public Participation Guidebook periodically to monitor the effectiveness of the procedures outlined in this document. All public participation efforts will be recorded by various City departments and reviewed on a routine basis. Following evaluation of the outputs and outcomes of the Public Participation Guidebook, the City may revise these methods to incorporate new and innovative ways to involve the public in the planning decision making process.



CITY OF IONIA

Proud of our past, confident of our future.