

Public Participation Plan Progress

Update for City Council on June 13, 2023



City of Westland

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INTRODUCTION

The Michigan Economic Development Corporation's (MEDC) Redevelopment Ready Communities program (RRC) recommends that communities review their plan annually to ensure that a community considers the effectiveness of their public participation strategies and identifies where improvements must be made. The RRC also encourages the community to report on progress of the plan annually to the local elected governing body.

The [current Public Participation Plan](#) was adopted in 2020, identifying effective/proactive engagement tools that increase accountability and transparency. It accomplishes this by providing a communications toolbox and a framework for seeking public input.

The strategy incorporates state and local laws as well as suggested guidance from MEDC to establish Westland's overall communications guidelines. To ensure that the City of Westland is most effectively engaging the public, the plan should be regularly reviewed and the strategies within updated.

The following report does not seek to be an exhaustive list of all the public participation activities the City of Westland has undertaken, but seeks to highlight key efforts that have been made to receive public input, and use that to improve the City's communications toolbox.

Continuing Outreach

Open Meetings Act

In accordance with Michigan statutes and a desire to gather stakeholder input, meetings of development-related boards and the City Council dedicate portions of their agenda to public comment, which allows stakeholders to voice their concerns and comments where decision-makers can listen.

Social Media

In the modern age, social media is one of the easiest and most effective ways to communicate with the public. As such, the City of Westland maintains social media accounts that disseminate important information to the public and keeps channels of communication open. The City also operates an email list that allows them to send out press releases, weekly or otherwise, directly to stakeholders.

The City of Westland is always looking for new ways to engage stakeholders. In 2023, the [After the Gavel](#) series was introduced on the WLND YouTube channel, and is also posted on the City of Westland – Administration Facebook page. In this series, the Mayor explains in depth some items from the City Council agenda that might otherwise not be discussed or discussed sufficiently during a Council meeting. This helps keep residents and other stakeholders more well-informed on Council business.

Every week, the WLND channel also uploads [This Week in Westland](#) series, which allows a different member of the City Council the opportunity to inform the residents of events and activities that will be happening during a week in the City of Westland.

Written Notices

The City maintains a newspaper of record to publish written notices, as required by State of Michigan law. As trends continue to change in print media, more and more newspapers are either going out of business or no longer printing physical copies of their paper. In 2023, this made it difficult for the City to acquire a newspaper of record, receiving no bids for the initial Request for Proposal. The City was able to adapt and eventually find a newspaper of record. The City will continue to adapt as necessary, but would also benefit from an update to the rules concerning the publication of these notices from state legislators.

Public Events

Council Study Sessions

The City of Westland's City Council holds study sessions open to the public, where they can discuss items more in-depth than they are able to at council meetings, and this provides both the Council and stakeholders the ability to give input on various happenings and developments within the city.

In 2022, the City of Westland held 27 study sessions. So far in 2023, the City has held 11 study sessions.

Notable study sessions include the 3 study sessions held on April 15th, 22nd, and 29th, 2023; all of which were Saturdays. This promotes the ability of stakeholders who are normally busy during the week to be able to attend these meetings. It was especially important to make these accommodations, as these study sessions were about the proposed FY23-26 budget for the City.

Another notable study session includes one on the proposed update to the City's Zoning Ordinance, held on March 14th, 2023. This session allowed for the presentation of the Zoning Ordinance update at the time, allowing for more input before it is finalized and passed by Council.

The Annex at Nankin Design Charrette

On Wednesday, December 14th, 2022, a charrette was held at Westland City Hall to gain input on The Annex at Nankin, a project designed to be a catalyst for development in the City Centre District. Stakeholders were shown a presentation of the designs for the park, and given an opportunity to voice their input on the designs and give recommendations for programming at this park. Following the conclusion of this meeting, an online survey was launched and was publicly promoted for the next two months to gain public input.

Marshall Project Open Houses

On Saturday, July 24th, 2021, and Saturday, July 31st, 2021, the City held open houses at the site of the former Marshall Upper Elementary School. At these open houses, community members were encouraged to take a tour of the building, and fill out index cards with their suggestions and ideas for how to reimagine the space and create something that would benefit the community. This was a unique idea to gather stakeholder input.

Surveys

Curbside Leaf Pick-Up Program Survey

The City mailed out over 20,000 physical surveys to residents to gain input on potentially bringing back a curbside leaf pick-up program, at no additional cost to taxpayers. The survey included a QR code so that residents could access a survey on the City's website and fill it out online. The City's Facebook page was also used to promote the online survey to increase engagement further. As a result, the survey received over 5,000 responses, with 91% of those responses showing support for the program. This was very useful in showing the community's desire for the return of the curbside leaf pick-up program, and guide decision makers thusly.

The Annex at Nankin Survey

Following the presentation of The Annex at Nankin project to the public, an online survey was made available and promoted to the community to gain input on the parks design, how it would be used, and the type of programming desired for such a location. The survey was promoted on the city's social media, as well as distributed through email lists for the multi-family housing nearby the proposed park location. In addition, a presentation was made by the Mayor and Business Retention Coordinator at one of the multi-family dwellings located near the proposed site, and physical copies of the survey were distributed and collected. In total, there were 635 responses to this survey from stakeholders.

New Business Inspection Process Survey

As the commercial business inspection process has been improved following the hiring of the Business Retention and Expansion Coordinator, it was determined that feedback should be gathered from businesses that go through the process to identify further areas for improvement. Once a business has completed the commercial re-occupation process, the Business Retention Coordinator sends the business their Certificate of Occupancy. At that time, the business is also sent a link to a survey on the City website to give their feedback on the commercial Re-Occupation process. The data from this survey is then recorded, and if suggestions were made for where the process can be improved, they are considered and implemented if they make sense and are feasible.

Suggested Improvements

Improve Evaluation Method

Economic Development Department Staff should develop a survey and distribute to external stakeholders, as well as relevant internal employees, to gain feedback on the City's public outreach. This will allow future progress reports on the Public Participation Plan to better suggest improvements, taking into account these outside opinions on the City's public outreach. This could also lead to an update of the Public Participation Plan if the feedback begets improvements.

Engage the Community More, when possible

A lot of the involvement with the community involves information dissemination, which is a boon for keeping the public informed. However, improvements can be made to encourage public input on more issues. Following the lead of the New Business Inspection Process Survey, other departments within the city should evaluate which of their public-facing processes could benefit from public input and create a mechanism for feedback that would allow them to evaluate and improve their processes.

Consider More Engagement Methods

While the City has incorporated methods of community engagement from the Public Participation Plan such as: community workshops, open meetings, charrettes, and surveys; there are other engagement methods mentioned in the Public Participation Plan that are currently underutilized and could see increased use. The City could utilize one-on-one interviews and focus groups to gather more personal in-depth exchanges and learn more about what matters most to stakeholders. One-on-one interviews can also be used within City Hall to gain more in-depth feedback and insight from city employees regarding public participation. Improved engagement should not just be limited to these listed activities, as the City should gladly adapt and innovate different ways to reach the community.