



*City of Arts & Innovation*

# Inclusiveness, Community Engagement, and Governmental Processes Committee Memorandum

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**TO: INCLUSIVENESS, COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND GOVERNMENTAL PROCESSES COMMITTEE**      **DATE: AUGUST 5, 2020**

**FROM: COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT**      **WARDS: ALL**

**SUBJECT: PREPARATION OF A CITYWIDE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY - DIRECT SUBMITTAL**

**ISSUE:**

Preparation of a Citywide Community Engagement Policy that creates consistency for future community engagement efforts; and provide an opportunity for community engagement and input prior to drafting a Policy for review by the Committee and for City Council consideration.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

That the Inclusiveness, Community Engagement and Governmental Processes Committee:

1. Direct staff to initiate a Citywide Community Engagement framework;
2. Provide input on the elements to consider in a Citywide Community Engagement Policy;
3. Direct staff to engage the community to seek input on the framework; and,
4. Direct staff to return to the Inclusiveness, Community Engagement and Governmental Processes Committee with a draft framework for review and comment prior to drafting a Policy for review by the Committee and City Council consideration.

**BACKGROUND:**

Citizens are “engaged” when they have the opportunity to play a meaningful role in discussions, decision-making and/or implementation of projects and programs that may affect their quality of life in the cities where they live. Engagement can be defined by a range of processes from providing clear, dependable information to residents, through asking residents to choose between or prioritize pre-set options, to empowering residents to participate in the development and delivery of local policies and services.

City staff engages with the community in various ways with practices that have been set by each individual department, based on the need for community input as well as for sharing educational information. City departments that regularly engage with the community have strategies that work for their individual needs; however, the process of engaging with the community has been inconsistent among City departments and members of the public have been asking for this to change.

Riverside has a rich tradition of local voluntary associations that promote and practice civic engagement. Currently, the City is aware of at least 22 active neighborhood associations as well as a number of neighborhood watch groups, civic organizations, clubs and committees, that host presentations and discussions, and advocate for issues and causes of importance to their membership. One of the areas of focus for neighborhood leaders has been the City's process for public engagement. Concerns have been expressed that the City's public engagement process is inconsistent and often comes across as "checking the box" rather than soliciting meaningful public input that would be incorporated into the City's decision-making process. In 2015, members of the Riverside Neighborhood Partnership and other neighborhood leaders came together to draft a Community Outreach Concept for the City. The concept demonstrated that the community wanted to be a more involved, active partner in the decision-making process, especially when decisions that are being made affect the quality of life within the neighborhoods in which they live.

Best practices for engaging the community have changed immensely over time. Many cities have formalized policies, guidelines and toolkits to assist staff in creating a process and providing direction in how and when to engage the public. The ways of engaging are changing as well, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. While there has been much success at engaging virtually, the need and the importance for engaging the community remains. However, the tools needed to be successful are still evolving. Because of the need to provide up-to-date tools and a consistent approach to community engagement, the idea to create a citywide Community Engagement Policy has become a staff-driven initiative.

### Legislative Policy/History - Community Engagement Requirements, Policies and Practices

The City values public engagement processes and activities that contribute to policy, program, service and project decisions by providing the City Council with the best possible information to support the decision-making process. Although there is no formal Community Engagement Policy in place, there are several laws that require public participation in the decision-making process. Some examples include the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the Riverside Municipal Code.

Public participation is a mandated and essential component of CEQA. Title 14, Section 15201 declares the importance that public participation is sought as an element of the CEQA process. It requires each agency to include provisions in its CEQA procedures for wide public involvement, formal and informal, consistent with its existing activities and procedures, in order to evaluate public reactions to environmental issues related to an agency's activities. The Riverside Municipal Code requires public participation in multiple instances: Title 19 requires that the City provide information to the public and facilitates public participation on planning matters as well as promotes understanding of the General Plan and regulations related to it.

There are also policies and plans that provide for community engagement including the General Plan 2025. Riverside's General Plan is a strategic, long-range planning document guiding growth to 2025. The Plan reflects the voices of hundreds of residents that shared their dreams and

creative ideas for the future of Riverside. Residents provided input on key land use, social, economic, environmental and cultural issues.

The City Council, Boards, Commissions, and Committees provide opportunities for community members to speak during public comment, during public hearings and on other city business listed on published agendas. The public may also formally share their thoughts and ideas via letters and emails, as well as via phone-in public comment which was provided during the COVID-19 pandemic. The City of Riverside also conducts a biennial Quality of Life survey to obtain feedback from residents, businesses and customers regarding City services, as well as community needs and priorities.

The Neighborhood Engagement Division within the Community & Economic Development Department actively seeks community engagement. The team engages the community regularly by participating in neighborhood meetings and by providing programming and events that encourage community participation and opportunities for neighbor-led community visioning. Other examples of community engagement efforts led or facilitated by the team include:

- A. Neighborhood Engagement Workshop Series: Provides opportunities for all City Departments to share information and educational opportunities as well as seek input on special projects. These events are held quarterly and have been utilized by several Departments including Riverside Public Utilities, Community & Economic Development, Riverside Police Department and others.
- B. Neighbor Fest: An event that provides residents with education in Asset-Based Community Development and helps them discover the assets in their neighborhoods that can be utilized to strengthen and build community participation.
- C. Neighborhood Strategy Visioning Sessions: Provides a facilitated approach to building upon the strengths of a neighborhood to create a vision, strategy and action plan for the future.
- D. Spring Into Health Fair: In partnership with Parks, Recreation & Community Services, this event was organized to provide an opportunity to educate community members on healthy eating and active living.
- E. Attending, listening and bringing back feedback gleaned from neighborhood meetings.

Community workshops are another common way City staff from many Departments solicit feedback from the community. Some examples include:

- A. Neighborhood Engagement Workshop Series – Special Edition: Several events were held throughout the City that provided an opportunity for the Office of Homeless Solutions to present and seek feedback on the Housing First Model.
- B. Riverside Police Chief Search Community Meetings: Residents were given the opportunity to participate in the search for a new Police Chief. Five meetings took place throughout the City in various locations. This effort was a collaboration with the City Manager’s Office and the Neighborhood Engagement Division. Input was received on what qualities the community wanted to see in its next Police Chief and the information was utilized to create the job description and interview questions for the position.

- C. General Plan Housing Element Update: Staff provided opportunities for community engagement through several methods including soliciting input at the Kaiser Permanente Farmer's Market, hosting a dedicated public workshop, and participation in the City's Neighborhood Conference. Additionally, a Citizen's Advisory Committee composed of representatives from the development industry, special needs groups, City commissions, fair housing representatives, and other parties was formed to discuss housing needs, the role of the Housing Element, and potential policy and programmatic responses to addressing Riverside's needs. These efforts were in collaboration with the City Manager's Office.
- D. Northside Interjurisdictional Specific Plan: Public outreach for the Northside Specific Plan provided diverse opportunities for community members to input into the Plan. Outreach efforts included the creation of a project website, regular updates on the City's social media platforms with project information, distribution of e-mail blasts with project updates and a series of community planning workshops. The Our Riverside Our Neighborhoods Initiative (ORON), a citizen-led visioning and action-oriented planning process led by the Neighborhood Engagement Division, also allowed Northside residents with the support of the City, to identify and celebrate neighborhood strengths through community involvement. The input gathered through the public workshops and outreach efforts was key in developing the Northside Specific Plan.

## **DISCUSSION:**

### **Importance of Community Engagement and Participation**

Not only is community engagement critical for a healthy democracy, it is also a requirement in some state statutes that local agencies provide the public with opportunities to participate in the decision-making process. Community engagement improves efficiency, legitimacy and transparency of public institutions. When community members participate in this process, ownership of the decision(s) increases. This process also builds community capacity by bringing people together around shared interests; improves public services to be more aligned with community needs; and creates more cohesion with residents, community organizations, businesses and local government.

There are multiple benefits to providing opportunities for inclusive community engagement in the decision-making process, including:

- Better identification of the public's values, ideas and recommendations
- More informed residents
- Improved local decision-making and actions, with better impacts and outcomes
- Increased community buy-in and support
- Faster project implementation
- More trust in each other and local government

Communities work better when residents, organizations and institutions are engaged and working together for the greater good of all. By providing meaningful community engagement, we can leverage local knowledge, experience and skills of community members and organizations that can increase synergy and foster resiliency.

Development of key indicators to measure is also critical. Typically, engagement outcomes are focused on measuring how many people were reached or how much attention was generated.

Some questions for the Committee to consider include:

1. What does successful community engagement look like?
2. How does one measure effective engagement?
3. Does the engagement and input lead to improved outcomes, improved quality of services, improved communication, more accessible services, and more equitable distribution of benefits and burdens?
4. How to report out engagement results and lessons learned?

### Elements to Consider

#### **Key Stakeholders**

Community engagement policies can be utilized to accommodate different perspectives and encourage residents and stakeholders to be informed and involved in the decision-making process. The Policy should include guidance for providing engagement and outreach efforts for a variety of uses with a clear purpose; involve community organizations and groups; and provide flexible opportunities to engage community members.

An important aspect of community engagement is thinking through the “who” to determine who will be interested in the topic under consideration. To better include business and community organizations, the Policy should include a list of community stakeholders with special consideration for people or groups who may be at risk of being excluded from participation.

Riverside has many community-based organizations and groups that have significant relationships in the larger community. By engaging with established organizations and groups, these relationships can be leveraged to engage people who might not be aware of planning efforts or know how to get involved. The Policy should also recognize Riverside’s youth and provide opportunities for them to engage as well. Involving youth could create a gateway to leadership, communication skills and access to additional opportunities for civic service.

Understanding who the community is, including those who experience barriers to engaging in planning, services and project efforts is critical. Some key questions include:

- Who are our community partners?
- Who can make community engagement more successful?
- Who has historically not been engaged?
- What community members are difficult to reach?
- Who will be impacted by a plan or project outcomes?
- Who are the beneficiaries?
- Are some voices louder and better organized than others?

#### **Community Engagement Implementation Plan/Toolkit**

As part of policy development, the Policy could include a Community Engagement Implementation Plan/Toolkit that would provide planning and outreach tools to guide staff through their community engagement efforts. This could include resources, best practices, effective methods, and

strategies for organizing engagement activities and would provide staff with several guiding questions to determine the level of engagement and approach to take, such as:

- What is the information/action/program/project that needs communicating?
- Who makes the final decision on the item?
- What type of community interaction is desired?
- Who needs to be informed?
- When does outreach happen?
- What needs to be done?
- What does success look like?

To achieve the benefits of meaningful community engagement with limited staff capacity and resources available, community engagement efforts need to encourage the use of new tools and strategies that meet people where they are. They should also have a broader reach to include diverse segments of the community, including youth, and should assist in building capacity in community organizations. The Toolkit should be a living document that is expanded over time as new engagement techniques are tried and applied in the community planning context and could include tools that help to define the scope of engagement, develop goals, identify stakeholders and create timelines.

### **Levels of Community Engagement**

Community engagement can be defined by a range of processes from simply providing information to residents, through asking residents to choose between pre-set options, to involving them in the development and delivery of policies and programs. It is important to involve people early in the process and engagement opportunities should be designed to fit people's everyday lives such as holding meetings after work hours and in the community. The Policy should provide guidance on how to create different levels of engagement so those with little time or resources are able to provide input, while giving others who want to be more involved the opportunity to participate on a deeper level.

A Citywide Community Engagement Policy that includes an implementation plan/toolkit tailored to building knowledge of residents' priorities and capacity for community engagement would provide more consistency with standard practices and would be helpful not only to staff but to the community at large. It would also assist in creating a path forward to adopting comprehensive policies and programs that encompass all aspects of sustainability and would create a culture that prioritizes effective and innovative public participation for all projects, across all departments.

Key questions include:

- How often will we inform the community throughout the process?
- How will we work with community members and/or stakeholders to find solutions to issues that are identified?

### **Sustainability Framework Consistency**

On March 10, 2020, the City Council participated in a workshop regarding the City's sustainability policies and goals for the future. After the discussion, the City Council directed staff to update the City's sustainability policies and goals to encompass environmental stewardship, social responsibility, and economic prosperity elements. One of the findings reported to Council was that a robust, inclusive stakeholder process that included strong community-based engagement was determined to be a best practice among national leaders.

Next Steps

Once the Inclusiveness, Community Engagement and Governmental Processes Committee directs staff to initiate a Citywide Community Engagement framework, staff will form a working group comprised of internal and external partners to review best practices and information available to prepare a draft framework. This information will be brought back to the Committee for consideration and input along with a plan of action to engage the community on thoughts and ideas for a community engagement plan. Once the framework is selected, it would be shared through a community engagement process before returning to the Committee. The framework would then be shaped into a Policy with community engagement and then be reviewed by the Committee, before finalizing a Policy to submit to City Council for consideration.

**FISCAL IMPACT:**

There is no fiscal impact anticipated with the development of a Citywide Community Engagement Policy.

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Attachment: Presentation