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Public Participation Plan

Oscoda Township

Updated November 2020





PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN

PARTICIPATION GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Oscoda Township strives to involve the community in the decision making process. Township staff draw on a variety of methods of communication and outreach in order to understand what our citizenry want and opine. Goals of our Public Participation Plan are outlined below.

Solicit public participation in each phase of planning processes. Throughout the multiple phases of a planning process, extensive participation components are, and will continue to be, incorporated to foster public participation. Proactive participation denotes early and continuous involvement in important policy or project decisions before they are finalized. There are many opportunities for the public to play a role in shaping short- and long-term needs, solutions, and funding priorities. The earlier the public is involved in the process, the greater the opportunity to influence important land - use decisions.

Effective and attentive communication with residents. The diverse characteristics and needs of residents require different communication and outreach techniques. Every resident has a voice and a say in the planning process, so the Township must reach as many as possible. There are many techniques and mechanisms available to ensure that a diverse public is well-informed and able to play a role in the planning process. Recognizing that no single technique or mechanism will work in all cases, it is up to the municipality to consider the special communication needs of the public and use the best approaches to accomplish this objective. The Township will utilize effective and equitable avenues for distributing information and receiving input.

Provide educational materials and design participation initiatives that will support and encourage active and effective participation. Effective participation in the decision-making process requires an understanding of land-use issues and the framework for making local investment decisions. Planning professionals and officials need to be well-versed in and employ visualization techniques that optimize public understanding of issues and concepts. Visualization techniques can be especially helpful with specific sites or areas of re-development.

Develop and maintain staff expertise in all aspects of participation. This includes techniques for bridging language, cultural, and economic differences that affect participation; ways to convey issues and information in meaningful ways to various cultural groups; and means for ensuring equitable representation for all segments of the population and sectors of the economy.

Support and encourage continuous improvement in the methods used to meet the public need for information and involvement. Public information and involvement methods are continually evolving. The municipality is committed to seeking new and innovative ways to engage and keep the public involved throughout the process.

Record results of public engagement and recount these results back to the public. To properly capture the concerns, priorities, and vision of the public, the municipality will develop a system to track the

various techniques and mechanisms of public input. To maintain transparency and consistency, the municipality will develop a method for sharing participation with the public.

STATE REGULATIONS

State of Michigan legislation details the minimum requirements for public participation. Oscoda abides by this legislation and strives to go above and beyond the traditional practices to be proactive in soliciting public input for all projects. Below are the laws regarding public input set by the state.

OPEN MEETINGS ACT (PA 267 of 1976)

The Michigan Open Meetings Act was created to require certain meetings of certain public bodies to be open to the public, to require notice and the keepings of minutes of the meetings. The entirety of the act can be accessed through the state department or at the following website address:

<http://www.legislature.mi.gov/documents/mcl/pdf/mcl-act-267-of-1976.pdf>

CHARTER TOWNSHIP ACT

Oscoda Township is a “charter township”, which means it operates under the general laws of the state of Michigan. Public Act 357 of 1947 establishes the Township form of government, and the Charter Township Act of 1970 establishes Oscoda as a charter township.

Any citizen can request that public bodies put them on a mailing list so that they are notified in advance of all meetings by contacting the Clerk’s office by email at clerk@oscodatownshipmi.org or by calling (989) 739-4971.

KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Below is a list of groups that are able to assist in and enhance the public participation process, as well as identify groups that are often not at the visioning table. During each public event the list will be reviewed in order to make sure that the appropriate people and groups are involved. Since groups and business, and their associates, are constantly changing, this list only serves as a reference on which to build upon for each event.

- Local residents
- Oscoda/AuSable Area Chamber of Commerce
- Large local employers
- Commercial business owners
- Neighboring municipalities
- Potential investors
- Public employees (village, library, police, fire, education)

- Real estate professionals
- Religious groups
- Senior groups
- Social organizations (Rotary Club, Lions Club, etc.)
- Students
- Young professionals
- Entrepreneurs

Oscoda is fortunate to have engaged residents eager to improve the community. However, the Township is continuously trying to get more and more residents involved. The Township will use various methods of communication to attempt to reach a variety of audiences.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT & OUTREACH STRATEGIES

There are many situations in which the Township will solicit public input for a plan or project. Public participation in the planning process not only satisfies political and public need, it also increases the likelihood of plan success by making a more durable document. When residents are involved in the plan process, they are more likely to stay involved afterwards by forwarding the vision and partaking in the action plan to better their community with a sense of ownership. Broad engagement in the planning process also helps to prevent delays caused by unforeseen issues. Engagement efforts will vary depending upon the type, intensity, and location of a project or plan.

Communication Toolbox

Oscoda's communication toolbox is full of methods including tried and true, and the latest and greatest. Township staff are always looking for new ways to communicate to the public, researching and experimenting with creative, new methods. The Township Superintendent is in charge of evaluating innovative opportunities, developing sustainable technological solutions, and promoting new media communication. Improving customer (resident) service performance is one of the Township's top priorities.

The Township website was updated in 2020-2021 to enhance online communications. Multiple social media accounts have been created by the Township, to communicate via Facebook. Using a variety of communication methods to get residents to a workshop, such as postcards and texts, could increase representation from all residents. The majority of Oscoda residents speak English. There are no identified sub populations that do not speak English. In order to prevent miscommunications, the Township should make accommodations if it is found that a resident(s) have a language barrier. Minority representation is just as important as representation from all ages, races, education levels, income levels, and political beliefs, regardless of gender or sexual orientation.

Basic Announcement Methods for Public Meetings

Public meetings will be announced on the Township website, posted at Township Hall, and shared via social media. Any newspaper, radio or television station wishing to be notified of public meetings will be notified without charge. Fliers, postcard mailings, attachments to utility

bills, and other means of announcing public meetings may also be utilized.

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 something, 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, churches can have them available to fill out and neighborhood groups can distribute them. As with most public input efforts, it is best to vary the delivery method (mailed, handed out, electronic) and include bilingual language where applicable. Technology has increased delivery methods of surveys, including via social media and mobile phone texting.

Workshops

Workshops can be as simple as a series of question-and-answer sessions or as creative as creating a board game. Often, workshops are a great way to educate the community and hear concerns, questions, and ideas. There are a variety of venues in Oscoda that offer the needed space for workshops, depending on the scope of the project and expected attendance. The Warrior Pavilion, Parks Library, Oscoda Area School buildings, Huron Shores Artisan Hall, and meeting space in local businesses are often used for public meetings. The Township's Zoom account can also be used for meeting purposes and educational purposes. Using a consultant to lead public involvement adds an objective and professional supervision to help participants resolve disagreements and develop effective solutions.

Charrettes

A charrette differs from a workshop because it is a multi-day event where designers and planners work on a plan in-between what are called "feedback loops." Usually between three and seven days, citizens can come to the "charrette studio," which is an office on or near the location of the proposed plan or project. Citizens offer ideas while the charrette team facilitates and observes. From these suggestions, the designers and planners change the plan to suit community input and present their creation the next day where the community offers feedback again. This makes up one cycle of a "feedback loop." There can be up to five feedback loops, resulting in a final plan shortly thereafter. This process can be completed with many different budgets, depending on the expertise of municipal state and local residents. Charrettes take much planning beforehand. Depending on the plan or project, a charrette will be an inclusive way to envision and create. The location and participants will be dependent on the scope of the project. Ideally, stakeholders to be effected by the project will convene for the charrette and it will be located near the project site.

Focus Groups

Focus groups can help to narrow down concepts or get a specific side of the story. Focus groups may be used to identify issues to prioritize and gather input on specific questions.



Standing Committees

These are focus groups that repeatedly meet and will differ depending on the needs of a community. They are perfect for concerned residents, underrepresented groups, or groups that may have specific needs in a community, such as students or seniors. This is an opportunity for a municipality to draw from the expertise of residents, perhaps organizing a standing committee of real estate professionals, business owners and brokers to offer feedback.

Social Networking

Technology offers a unique opportunity to give and receive information to a mass of people. Municipalities can post events, share information and even solicit feedback online. This public participation method is best used in conjunction with other methods, because it excludes those who do not use social media. The ability to spread misinformation or post disrespectful comments easily makes it important to plan for the use of social media.

Social media has become an effective and efficient channel of communication between the community and local government. The Township of Oscoda's social media efforts shall contribute toward the advancement of our presence as a digital community. Social media's ability to drive community information, news, and opinion in real time helps the Township realize operating efficiencies, garner citizen engagement, and realize strategic objectives.

The Township has an overriding interest and expectation in deciding what is 'announced' or 'spoken' on behalf of the Township on social media sites. A written policy establishes internal procedures for the use of social media by Oscoda Township employees when posting for the Township as well as personal use of social media when applicable. Social media sites include, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, Pinterest, and other approved sites that are similar in content and/or character.

The Superintendent's Office manages and approves all social media users. The Township Superintendent is responsible for maintaining a robust social media presence to keep users engaged throughout the year. Department personnel may be approved to post in order to share project specific content. Target audiences may differ by social media site - for example, business owners and professionals through LinkedIn, or parents and creatives by Pinterest. Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter generally have a wider audience that spans age groups, but is limited to those with the proper technology to access.

Social media can be used to update audiences on progress of a project, distribute meeting notifications, solicit feedback from surveys or general comments, and generally engage and inform users.

Websites

Websites offer an omnipresent, easily-accessible method for distributing information, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Users know where to go to get the information or can search for content online. Oscoda's new website offers an attractive and practical platform to access an abundant database of contact information, service offerings, project information, and much more.

Phone/Mobile



Texting is considered to be a technology that most people have access to and know how to use. Texting potentially reaches the widest audience. Children and young adults with mobile devices are more likely to communicate via text than other traditional and social media methods. Senior and low-income populations are the most likely to not text, but more and more are gaining access every day. Texting technology is becoming more affordable and widespread. The Township will explore the different options that are available.

Public Involvement and Comment

The following traditional public involvement strategies will be used by the Township of Oscoda as part of public outreach:

- Public Meetings
- Community Town Hall Meetings
- Community Task Force Meetings
- Newspaper Postings
- Person to Person Communication
- Website and Social Media Postings
- Public Announcements
- Utility Bill Notices
- Television and Radio Notices
- Surveys and Public Event Outreach

In addition to the traditional methods used by the Township to get citizens involved in the decision making process that will shape the future of the community, the following non-traditional methods will also be used to reach out to the citizens of the community:

- Lunch and Learn – come learn what township boards or staff learned at recent trainings. Topics vary widely, but these sessions are open to staff and the public. Dates vary.
- Huddle At The HSAH – The Economic Improvement Director hosts once-monthly open times to come share your thoughts and hear what’s happening in Oscoda. Speak with staff and share your hopes, dreams, and ideas. These occur the third Friday of every month.
- Quarterly Newsletters – These will be shared in a variety of places, but will feature updates from Township Hall departments and the Township Supervisor. Older newsletters are available on the Township website.

BOARDS AND PUBLIC MEETINGS

Township boards, commissions, and committees have different requirements governing public comment and input in processes and meetings. All operate under the guidance of the Open Meetings Act (PA 267 of 1976) as stated above. While public comment and engagement is encouraged at all times, there are specific processes that require more engagement.

Master Plan Update



The Master Plan is the visioning document for the Township, from which future developments and policy are created. Therefore, it is the most important planning process to get the broadest engagement and most public input. A variety of communication tools should be used with an effort to gain attention and involvement from the widest sample of residents, representative of the entire community. At least two workshops or visioning forums should be held. Notice will be given to all residents when the planning process begins and when a draft plan has been created. A public forum will be held to review the draft document. Various other input methods should be used as well, including, but not limited to, web surveys, interactive mapping projects, electronic updates, or focus groups.

Zoning Ordinance Update

The Zoning Ordinance is the regulating document which helps forward the vision of the Township as well as promote the public health, safety and general welfare. Since the document establishes comprehensive zoning regulations and provides for the administration, enforcement and amendment of those regulations, it is important that the public are informed of and can give input about updates. Zoning regulation is based off of the master plan and therefore doesn't need as extensive of an input process. However, informing and educating the public about updates or revisions of the ordinance is important. Traditional communications methods are most appropriate.

Parks and Recreation Plan

Workshops, focus groups, surveys, websites, and/or alternative methods are useful in recreation planning. Gaining public input through surveys, public meetings, and workshops may be appropriate for updating the Parks and Recreation Plan.

Development Plans

Development plans are reviewed by Township staff. Some plans are able to be approved administratively, while some are forwarded to the Planning Commission for review and approval. Larger, or high-controversy development plans will most likely require one or more focus groups of relevant residents, business owners, and/or organizational leaders. Proactive notification and timely education can prevent some controversy. Mailings, media, websites, and other methods can keep residents informed to prevent misinformation and misunderstanding. Public hearings can allow developers, residents and officials to work through development plans and solicit input. Oscoda Township is willing to assist a developer seeking community input, if needed, and will help to facilitate these conversations, where appropriate, throughout a development project.

COMMUNICATING RESULTS

Results from public participation sessions will be communicated back to the public by including it in the final plan document. Media can also be released immediately following a public input session to publish how many people attended and solicit further participation for future meetings. This demonstrates that the responses were heard, shows that public input is desired, and creates an environment of transparency.

- Public Meetings: Meeting minutes are posted online.

- Surveys: Surveys will be compiled by a consultant or village staff no later than three-four weeks after the survey is complete. Results will be posted online or in the appendix of the plan.
- Community workshops/charrettes: Township staff are in charge of taking notes during workshops and charrettes. These notes will be shared at the end of the event as well as posted on a plan website if applicable. The notes will also be part of the plan appendix.
- One-on-one interviews: Interview results will be kept confidential for the comfort of the participants unless otherwise requested.
- Focus groups: Focus groups results will be kept confidential for the comfort of the participants unless otherwise requested.
- Standing committees: Meeting minutes will be taken by the appropriate secretary and made available to the public when appropriate.

EVALUATION AND IMPROVEMENT

Continuous review of our public input processes is the only way that Oscoda will remain a thriving and connected community. The residents are what make Oscoda such a great community to live in. Their creativity and talent are irreplaceable in the planning processes of the community. Therefore, reflection on communication and involvement efforts is needed to verify that optimal methods are used. Results can be analyzed by keeping records of participation, including the types of communication used, the quality and quantity of comments received, and the number of participants involved. The hired consultant or staff will be in charge of documenting participation. Documentation will contribute to a public participation process that is continuously evolving to better obtain public input. To insure that methods are effective, the Public Participation Plan will be reviewed annually and updated when necessary. Methods that have failed will not be removed from this plan, but will be reviewed and documented so that the same mistakes will not be made in the future.

CLOSING

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.