



Vacaville Public Involvement Strategy For Land Use Planning

Adopted 1/28/2020 by Resolution 2020-018

OVERVIEW

Vacaville's General Plan establishes a vision for the future of the city. Citizen participation and assistance is critical to achieving this vision. Because of this, the City of Vacaville is committed to engaging in meaningful public participation. Input received early in land use planning and development review processes better enables the City and project applicants to incorporate suggestions and ideas from the community, ultimately resulting in improved outcomes. Early outreach helps to educate and encourage communication, providing more certainty to developers and our community.

While legal standards establish minimum requirements for public outreach, effective public involvement requires more than the minimums. The intent of this policy is to establish specific expectations that project applicants will provide greater opportunities for meaningful public input during the review process. While this is not a guarantee that everyone who may want to participate does, it does establish a reasonable expectation that, by following these guidelines, there are adequate opportunities for public involvement prior to decisions being made.

In addition to considering diverse community input, the official decision-maker must consider complex legal standards, adopted land use plans, private property rights, and economic realities. A good decision-maker will listen and carefully consider all input received before making a decision. Community input is always valued and frequently shapes design and decision making, even though it is inevitable that decisions made won't please every participant.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT STRATEGY ELEMENTS

This public involvement strategy includes four elements that are critical to effective public involvement:

- Notice
- Information Sharing
- Exchange of ideas
- Public input

Each of these is described on the following pages.



Notice

Public involvement begins with notice. Notice should be broad enough so those most interested in or affected by a proposal know about it, can learn more, and know how they can participate.

State law and city ordinances dictate the minimum notice requirements, which typically include:

- Mailed notice within a certain radius
- Posted notice on site
- Published notice in the newspaper of public hearings

For larger impact projects, notice may include the following:

- Expanded notice radiuses to include entire blocks, neighborhoods or to extend to natural boundaries
- Posting on the City's website
- Announcements on social media
- E-mail lists
- Announcements through other media, such as TV and radio



Figure 1: Example of extended notice radius

Staff will regularly review notice formats for clarity and plain language.



Information sharing

Public involvement is most effective when citizens have access to and understand plans, studies, rules, and other information about a project. That way they can provide meaningful input to shape the project and decisions.

Copies of applications and project plans are available at the Community Development office for the public to review.

One of the best resources for sharing information is the City's website. The Community Development Department posts basic information about every project application through its permit software. In addition, the department creates project specific pages with extensive information about larger impact projects.

Depending on the project level, information may be shared in other ways, including:

- Social media posts
- Through radio, TV and other media. For example, the department airs a regular program, *What's the Plan*, that shares information about upcoming projects.
- Booths or kiosks at events
- Printed material available at libraries or other public places

Figure 2: Booth at community event





Exchange of Ideas

The real value of public involvement comes when ideas can be shared between the public, applicants, and decision makers. Opportunities for exchange ideally should be provided before a project is finalized and decisions need to be made.

Staff availability

For all levels of projects, city staff are available during business hours to discuss projects in person, by phone, or by e-mail.

Administrative hearings

For medium impact projects that don't require Planning Commission hearings, staff holds administrative hearings. These are informal meetings, usually held at City Hall, where members of the public can review plans for a project, ask questions, and share ideas and concerns.

Neighborhood and Community Meetings

Neighborhood and community meetings are effective ways of providing information to the public about a project and promoting exchange of ideas. They provide opportunities for citizens to talk with project applicants and city staff directly about a project in a forum that is less intimidating than a formal hearing. Having a neighborhood meeting early in the process allows a project to be refined prior to final decisions.

Neighborhood meetings preferably are held close to the project location, such as at a nearby school, church or park.

Notice of a neighborhood meeting is mailed in the same manner as the public notice for a hearing. Notice also is posted on the City's website. The project applicant also should seek to include notice in informal avenues such as a neighborhood e-mail list or social media groups or posted notice at the neighborhood meeting site. In addition, city staff can collect mailing addresses at the meeting of additional individuals for future notices.

At least one neighborhood meeting is required for large impact projects. Meetings for citywide impact projects are included in that project's public involvement plan.

Booths and pop-ups

For citywide projects, project staff can provide a booth or pop up display at community events. In this way, members of the public can learn about a project and share ideas in a simple and unimposing way.

Online engagement: *Let's Talk Vacaville*

The City uses a tool, *Let's Talk Vacaville*, as a way to engage the public online. This tool not only allows the City to provide information about projects, it provides a forum for the public to share comments and suggestions, and to receive feedback about those comments.



Figure 3: Community Meeting

Public Input

Public involvement culminates with formal public input. Formal input is done in two ways:

- **Submission of written comments.** These can be letters, comment cards, or e-mails.
- **Public hearings.** The City holds formal public hearing on projects. The Planning Commission holds hearings on land use items. Depending on the project, some are forwarded to the City Council for final decisions.

Level of Participation

While public participation is open to anyone who wishes to be included, different levels of projects warrant more or less outreach. When a project is proposed, the Community Development Director will assign it to one of four categories as listed below. Staff will include the level within the reports. The level may be adjusted where initial feedback indicates a project has different impacts than first anticipated.



Small Impact Project

A small impact project is one that is likely only to affect properties next door or very close. There is little discretion in decision making. Examples are:

- Administrative permits, such as home occupation permits, large family day cares, and administrative clearances
- Modifications or additions to existing buildings
- New uses in existing buildings
- A residential development or subdivision of 10 or fewer lots or dwelling units
- House plan approval in an approved development
- A new commercial building 25,000 sq. ft. or less in an existing commercial area
- A new industrial building 100,000 sq. ft. or less in an existing industrial area



Medium Impact Project

Medium Impact Project is one that is likely to affect properties in the immediate neighborhood, including properties that may be beyond the minimum notification radius. There is usually some discretion in decision making. Examples are:

- A new large commercial or office building in a commercial area (25,000 – 100,000 sq. ft.)
- A new small commercial building (under 25,000 sq. ft.) adjacent to a residential area.
- A residential subdivision or multifamily project of 11-100 lots or units
- Cell towers



Large Impact Project

A large impact project is one that is likely to affect an area much broader than just the surrounding neighborhood. There is usually discretion in decision making. Examples are:

- A residential subdivision or multifamily project of over 100 lots or units
- A new commercial building or complex over 100,000 sq. ft.
- A new industrial building over 250,000 sq. ft.



Citywide impact Project

A citywide impact project is any proposal, regardless of size or type, which has the potential for significant city-wide interest. There is usually substantial discretion in decision making. Examples are:

- A new specific plan
- A significant Development Code or General Plan amendment

Expected Public Outreach by Project Level

The table below lists the expected public outreach for projects of different impact levels.

	Small impact	Medium impact	Large impact	Citywide impact
Notice				
Mailed notice	300 feet radius or per code	600 feet radius or per code	Radius extended to include entire block or to natural boundary	Per public involvement plan
On-site posting	Per code	✓	✓	For site specific projects
Newspaper posting		Per code	✓	✓
Website posting		✓	✓	✓
Social media posting			As appropriate	✓
E-mail list			As appropriate	✓
Information sharing				
Project listing online	✓	✓	✓	✓
Project specific web page			✓	✓
Social media, other media, booths, printed materials			As appropriate	Per public involvement plan
Exchange of ideas				
Staff available (counter, e-mail, phone)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Administrative hearing		✓		
Neighborhood or community meetings			✓	✓
Online engagement ("Let's Talk Vacaville")			As appropriate	✓
Public Input				
Submission of written comments	✓	✓	✓	✓
Public hearings		Per code	Per code, often multiple	Per code, often multiple



Feedback, Adjustments, and Evaluation

The public involvement process is one that always can be refined and improved. The end of one process is often the beginning of the next.

1. The City will provide ways for those who have made comments to know the outcome of decisions, such as by providing written notice of decisions to those who provide written comments and by posting information on the website.
2. The City will evaluate and adjust this plan as needed to respond to new information, new technologies, and improved methods of communication.