

Community Culture Action Area Civic Engagement Background Paper

Existing Goals

Lake Oswego's 1994 Comprehensive Plan identifies three goals for citizen involvement:

1. Create opportunities for every interested citizen to be involved in all phases of the planning process to ensure that their concerns are heard;
2. Encourage broadly based public participation including all geographic areas and diverse interests; and,
3. Ensure regular and ongoing two-way communication between citizens and City elected and appointed officials.

Planning for People, Places and Prosperity (show nested diagram)

As the City develops key elements of the Comprehensive Plan update, sustainability – defined for Lake Oswego as meeting the vital human needs of the present without compromising our ability to meet future needs – is an important consideration. Strategic questions will aid in the decision-making framework moving forward. Planning in a sustainable way means looking at the community as an interrelated system that includes places around us (the natural and built environment), people (that live and work here), and prosperity (of the local economy) that supports society's needs. As an example, strong civic engagement supports a sustainable Lake Oswego in the following ways.

Providing the opportunity for civic engagement supports a sustainable Lake Oswego in the following ways:

- **People:** Civic engagement activates civic pride, innovation and community dialog.
- **Places:** Civic engagement fortifies a sense of stewardship and increased awareness of the City's role in the community, public resources and limitations.
- **Prosperity:** Civic dialog and engagement recognizes and supports community organizations focused on prosperity and economic vitality such as the Chamber of Commerce and other organizations that work to support a thriving business community.

Introduction

The civic engagement background paper is a part of *We Love Lake Oswego: Planning for People, Places and Prosperity*, a multi-year effort to guide the physical, economic, social, cultural and environmental development of Lake Oswego over the next 20 years. The current Comprehensive Plan chapter under Goal 1, Citizen Involvement is geared towards public involvement in the land use process.

This document provides a basic framework for understanding civic engagement in the City of Lake Oswego. It outlines the City's existing goals for citizen involvement, policy questions and potential changes for consideration during the Comprehensive Plan update process. It describes the history and of citizen involvement in Lake Oswego and the City's current practices, including the link between

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citizen engagement and sustainability. Finally, the paper looks at trends in citizen engagement and related considerations for implementation of the Comprehensive Plan.

Background

The City of Lake Oswego believes that planning and decision making is a responsibility of all residents. The City invites its citizens to be involved in all aspects of the planning process, including data collection, plan preparation, adoption, implementation, evaluation and revision. Lake Oswego is fortunate to have an active citizenry which cares about the community deeply enough to prioritize involvement in the planning process.

The original Comprehensive Plan was developed from 1974-1978 with substantial citizen involvement, extensive research and thorough review and hearing by public officials. A neighborhood association program and the first 10 neighborhood associations were established as part of the planning process. At that time, seven boards and commissions also existed as advisory bodies to the City Council. Program guidelines for citizen involvement were created in 1975 with the intent of having a better informed citizenry and to provide a framework for government and citizen involvement.

The first update of the Comprehensive Plan occurred in 1993. The Lake Oswego Comprehensive Plan Review Committee (LOCPRC) was created to review policy recommendations and oversee the process. A Citizen Involvement Program was developed to ensure maximum participation in the planning process. Citizen Involvement Guidelines were adopted by the City Council in 1991. They were last updated in April, 2009. Since the late 1990s, the Planning Commission has served as the Committee for Citizen Involvement whose purpose is to assist in the development, implementation and evaluation of citizen involvement programs. In 1993, Lake Oswego had 15 active, recognized neighborhood associations and 11 boards and commissions through which citizens could become involved in the planning process.

As of February, 2012, there are 22 recognized neighborhood associations within the City of Lake Oswego. Additionally, neighborhood plans, official elements of the City of Lake Oswego Comprehensive Plan, have been adopted by City Council for eight neighborhoods. Citizens can also apply to become a member of one of the City's 12 boards and commissions.

The city uses a variety of techniques to engage a representative cross-section of the community. As a two-way flow of information between citizens and policy makers leads to informed decisions, a more engaged citizenry and better public support of policies and programs, the City is interested in this dialog. The tools and techniques used to provide citizens with information include: notices in public places and newspapers, summaries of City documents, flyers, brochures, neighborhood newsletters, informational meetings, presentations, mailings, citizen information center, City Council digest and dispatch, Facebook, Twitter, RSS, Code Red Emergency Notification, HelloLO, LO-Down newsletter, and listservs.

The City of Lake Oswego also uses a broad spectrum of outreach methods to gather citizen input on specific projects, appropriate to the scale of a given planning effort. These methods include: publicly-advertised meetings, statistically valid surveys, public comment periods at meetings, pre-application conferences, neighborhood meetings, focus groups, ad-hoc citizen advisory committees, the City's web-based "Open City Hall" and citizen information center among others.

While the City does not currently have formal ways of tracking citizen engagement, the following Quality of Life Indicators provide some insight into recent levels of participation:

- 2009 – 62% of residents are registered voters
- 2008 – 89% of registered voters participated in general elections
- 2005 – 56% of residents volunteered
- 2003 – 59% of residents volunteered

One of Lake Oswego’s four sustainability principles is to “Support people to meet their own needs.” As stated in the Citizen Involvement Guidelines, the City strives to ensure that all its residents are aware of, understand and have the opportunity to express their opinions regarding planning decisions. The first step toward achieving these goals is to identify the various demographic groups and civic organizations in Lake Oswego, to learn about and respond to their needs. Specific targeted demographic groups could include the aging population, professionals and families with young children. Once their preferred means of engagement is known, institutionalize methods that reach them. Remove barriers which may include language, technology and meeting locations and times. The City currently develops targeted strategies to overcome these barriers and enhance opportunities for involvement and is always looking to improve its practices. Holding meetings in various locations and providing electronic opportunities for involvement are examples of strategies to improve citizen engagement.

Trends in Citizen Engagement

Technology and Social Media

Technological innovations have changed how government and citizens interact. Internet applications, including social networking websites, blogs, video conferencing and online surveys, allow government and citizens to exchange information instantaneously. An added advantage of social networking websites is that they can be used effectively and inexpensively to engage people in spaces where they already spend time.

Other innovations include land use planning scenario software and virtual simulations. These tools are effective in describing complex ideas, help citizens visualize alternatives and understand the implications of their choices.

Each application has a unique purpose and set of participants. Some are general in nature while many others appeal to people with specific interests. Some tools can be used to convey information while others can be structured to encourage dialogue. Choosing the right tool requires research of the application and its users and matching them with process objectives. After launching these tools, organizers should track the dialogue and update accordingly. It also is important to note that not everyone has access to or is comfortable with new technologies. Others are interested in learning and applying new technologies.

Community Partnerships

Traditionally, citizen engagement efforts and decision-making processes are led and funded by local governments. Collaboration among public, private, nonprofit and academic sectors is more likely to be successful than efforts led by a sole entity. Partnerships with foundations, chambers of commerce, schools and universities and nonprofit organizations may provide a number of other benefits to community engagement processes. Partners can share resources, help ensure broad participation and ultimately aid in Comprehensive Plan implementation.

Sources

- *Lake Oswego Comprehensive Plan*, City of Lake Oswego, Adopted 1994.
- www.ci.oswego.or.us/home/commmunity/commi.htm
- *Citizen Involvement Guidelines*, City of Lake Oswego, 2009.
- *Innovative Civic Engagement Tools and Practices in Land Use Decision-Making*, Cogan Owens Cogan, LLC, 2010.
- International Association of Public Participation www.iap2.org