

Section III: Improving the Minneapolis CE System

Summary Recommendations

While there are some conflicting views expressed in the observations and recommendations outlined in the previous section of this report, there is widespread agreement about five summary recommendations. In order to improve its current community engagement system, most internal and external stakeholders agree that the City of Minneapolis should:

- 1. Explain the decision-making authority for each type of city decision;**
- 2. Clarify the roles and responsibilities of all official advisory groups;**
- 3. Establish predictable, base-line CE expectations for each type of decision;**
- 4. Develop accessible, consistent, two-way communication systems; and**
- 5. Coordinate planning and priority setting with other public jurisdictions.**

In addition to these summary recommendations, the Mayor and City Council may want to review the community input summarized in Section II and consider other suggested improvements.

Recommendation 1: Explain the decision-making authority for each type of city decision

This first recommendation is the easiest to implement because the decision-making authority for most major decisions has already been established by law, ordinance or policy. What's missing is a clear, consistent explanation of who has the authority to make each type of decision.

One of the reasons decision-making authority becomes confused is that many different entities may be involved in formulating recommendations or providing input to the final decision maker, and sometimes these advisory steps are formal and involve making decisions. An example is the Minneapolis Planning Commission, which makes recommendations to the City Council about planning applications of various kinds. While the Council is the final decision-making authority, the Planning Commission "approves" or "denies" applications when making its recommendation to the Council. The Mayor also has the power to veto actions of the City Council. As a result, there can be confusion about who really has the authority to make a planning-related decision: is it the Planning Commission, the City Council or the Mayor?

There are many methods the City could use to explain this. Here is one possibility. Using the three decision categories from the previous section of this report, the City and its jurisdictional partners could construct a chart that identifies the entity with the final responsibility to make each type of decision. Such a chart could also identify the entities that have an official advisory role – and may make formal recommendations – but do not make the final decision.

The chart on the following page illustrates this concept. It includes a few examples of decisions under each category. The letter "A" indicates advisory authority and the letter "D" indicates the final decision-making authority. When the City Council has the "D," the Mayor also has a "V" indicating his authority to veto the Council's decision.

City Decision-Making Authority Chart (mock up)

<p><i>Key to Chart:</i> D = Decision-making authority A = Advisory authority V = Veto authority</p> <p><i>Note: This draft mock up illustrates a concept and may not be accurate!</i></p>	Federal Government	State Government	Hennepin County	Mayor	City Council	School Board	Library Board	Park & Rec Board	Board of Est & Tax	NRP Policy Board	Planning Commission
Citywide Decisions											
CDBG Funding (total & distribution)	D			A	A						
Local Government Aid (total amount)		D	A	A	A	A	A	A			
NRP Funding (total program funding)		D	A	A	A	A	A	A			
Property Tax Levy (max. tax collected)			A	A	A	A	A	A	D		
Property Tax Distribution (per jurisdiction)			A	A	A	A	A	A	D		
LGA Distribution (per jurisdiction)			A	V	D	A	A	A			
Mpls 5-Year Goals & Business Plans				V	D						
Mpls Ordinances, Policies, Regulations				V	D						
Mpls Comprehensive Plan & Zoning Code				V	D						A
Mpls Capital and Operating Budgets				V	D						
School System-wide Decisions						D					
Library System-wide Decisions							D				
Park System-wide Decisions								D			
Community Decisions											
Small-Area & Corridor Plans				V	D						A
Multi-neighborhood Projects				V	D						A
Zoning Overlay Districts				V	D						
Community-specific City Programs				V	D						
School Community-specific Decisions						D					
Library Community-specific Decisions							D				
Park Community-specific Decisions								D			
Local Decisions											
NRP Funding Distribution (per action plan)			A	V	D	A	A	A		A	
Local Zoning Change or Variance				V	D						A
Individual Development Project Decisions				V	D						A
Individual School Program Decisions						D					
Individual Library Program Decisions							D				
Individual Park Program Decisions								D			

Recommendation 2: Clarify the roles and responsibilities of all official advisory groups

Recommendations 2 and 3 are closely related. In order to establish clearer expectations about CE activities, it will also be necessary to clarify the roles and responsibilities of the advisory groups the City identifies as part of its CE system. This includes permanent boards and commissions, temporary advisory groups and committees, and community organizations. Clarifying the roles and responsibilities of each type of advisory group presents its own challenges.

The City of Minneapolis currently has over 50 permanent boards and commissions, each of which has its own unique purpose, governing documents and operating procedures. Because these groups were established over a period of many years – and for widely varying purposes – there is understandable confusion about roles and responsibilities of each group with respect to engaging the community in City decisions.

In some cases - for example the Capital Long-Range Improvements Committee (CLIC) - the role and responsibility of the committee and the way it engages the community to influence specific budget decisions is very clear. In other cases, the role of the advisory group and what kinds of City decisions it is expected to engage the community around (if any) may be less clear.

Temporary advisory groups and committees tend to have well-defined purposes because they are convened around a particular task. The clarification required may have more to do with when temporary advisory groups are an expected part of engaging the community around a type of City decision and when they are not. For example, are community advisory committees always convened to advise the City on major new policies and programs, or just in some cases?

Community organizations come in a wide variety of shapes and sizes. The City has typically recognized geographic organizations, such as neighborhood groups, as official partners in certain types of community engagement activities. However, as noted in Section II, there is a growing awareness that while some communities are geographic, others are non-geographic in nature and may be best engaged by non-geographic community organizations.

In order to clarify the roles and responsibilities of community organizations, it will be important to consider the distinction between geographic and non-geographic community organizations.

The City of Minneapolis currently has citizen participation contracts with 77 neighborhood groups, which define specific roles and responsibilities for these geographic community organizations as part of the City's current CE system. The City does not currently have citizen participation contracts with non-geographic community organizations, but may want to consider this in the future, based on the observations and recommendations summarized in Section II.

There are many good local and national models for how cities officially relate to community organizations, including the City's current structure of neighborhood groups. There are also many different models for how these community organizations are supported, financially, by cities and others. The chart on the following pages illustrates examples of officially-recognized community organizations from the cities that were referenced in one or more of the CE reports and recommendations reviewed by the staff work group.

Comparison of Official Community Organizations by City

	Type of Community Organization (CO)	Official Role and Responsibilities of CO	# COs Funded	Funding per CO	Total City Funding
Atlanta	Neighborhood Planning Units are all-volunteer organizations without non-profit status	All city departments use the NPUs for citizen input, review and recommendation; NPUs meet monthly	24	\$0	\$0
Baltimore	Office of Neighborhoods at city has one liaison for each of 6 geographic districts, who work with various community organizations	Community organizations have no official roles or responsibilities, but work informally through the 6 city liaisons	0	\$0	\$0 Office of Neighborhoods has \$623,000 budget
Jacksonville	Citizen Planning Advisory Committees; neighborhood associations and city council appoint members	Advise city on land-use and zoning decisions; Mayor meets annually with each CPAC and quarterly with presidents	6	\$0 (city provides one staff for CPAC)	\$0
Los Angeles	Certified Neighborhood Councils	City's Department of Neighborhood Empowerment staffs and assists CNCs with education, outreach and training	7	\$50,000	\$350,000
Madison	Neighborhood Planning Councils have a city staff liaison and a facilitator; they are funded jointly by the city, county, school district, United Way and local foundations	Neighborhood associations may organize to form NPCs; individual NAs do not receive city operating support, but can apply for competitive project-specific grants	3	\$100,000 in joint city, county, school, United Way and foundation support	\$300,000 in joint city, county, school, United Way and foundation support
Minneapolis	Neighborhood Groups; independent non-profits that have Citizen Participation contracts with the city; many NGs also receive funds from the Neighborhood Revitalization Program (NRP) and other sources	NG is responsible for CE on contract-specified activities including land sales; development proposals, policies and guidelines; identifying neighborhood issues or needs for city services or programs	77	\$2,000 to \$20,000 amount varies by CDBG eligibility and city formula	\$447,461 total CDBG + gen. fund in 2006

	Type of Community Organization (CO)	Official Role and Responsibilities of CO	# COs Funded	Funding per CO	Total City Funding
Portland	District Coalition Boards; independent non-profits that contract with city; city supports 7 neighborhood offices and provides printing and mailing support; most have three FTEs	Facilitate both CE and neighborhood crime-prevention activities; also raise non-city funds to supplement operating expenses; composed of representatives from member neighborhood associations	7	\$214,286 average per DCB; not including 10 crime prevention specialists	\$1.5M total for DCB staff and rent; plus \$1M for crime prevention specialists
Seattle	District Councils; membership includes representatives from Community Councils, local Chambers of Commerce, PTSAs and other community non-profit organizations	DCs rate neighborhood projects; funnel budget requests; provide forum for community issues; 1 resident and 1 business representative from DC serve on a citywide Council of Neighborhoods	13	\$0	\$0 city offers competitive project-specific grants; not operating support
St. Paul	District Councils; independent non-profits; officially recognized and supported financially by the city; most have one or two FTEs	Provide zoning review; update community plans; provide outreach on Council issues; host neighborhood forums and/or annual meetings	19 (there are 17 districts; one has 3 DCs)	\$30,000 minimum; based on formula; plus crime prevention funding	\$600,000 CDBG + gen. fund for DCs; plus crime prevention funding
Vancouver	Neighborhood Integrated Service Teams include staff from Fire, Police, Planning, Libraries, Engineering, Permits and Licenses, located in community offices	15 NISTs focus on service delivery, not community development issues; the city doesn't officially recognize neighborhood groups, but does appoint citizen advisory groups	0	\$0	\$0

Note on this chart: The challenge is to compare apples with apples, since there are many kinds of community organizations and CE processes. Using the definition that “community engagement always involves an impending city government decision,” this chart includes only organizations that a city officially relies on to engage residents in city decisions on a permanent, ongoing basis. As a result, it does not include time-limited or project-specific CE activities, or programs that are intentionally funded for a specific period of time, such as temporary advisory groups or task forces, small-area planning processes or the NRP.

Recommendation 3: Establish base-line CE expectations for each type of City decision

In order to bring some consistency and predictability to the system, the City should establish base-line community engagement activities for each type of decision. Departments or elected officials might choose to go beyond these base-line activities for a particular decision, but at least these base-line activities would always occur, and the community could count on them.

Combining the types of City decisions identified above with the CE activities identified earlier, it would be possible to construct a chart that identifies the base-line expectations for each type of decision. The chart below illustrates this concept. “M” indicates activities that are mandated by statute, ordinance or policy; “B” indicates other base-line CE activities that always occur.

Base-Line CE Activity Chart (mock up)

	Activities of Elected Officials and Their Offices	Standing Committees of the City Council	Formal Public Hearings of the City Council	Official Advisory Boards and Commissions	Temporary Advisory Groups or Committees	Citywide Communication and CE Activities	Citywide and Small-Area Planning Activities	Dept-, Program- or Project-Specific Activities	Geographic Community Org. Activities	Non-Geographic Community Org. Activities
<p><i>Key to Chart:</i> M = Mandatory activity B = Base-line activity (always occurs)</p> <p><i>Note: This draft mock up illustrates a concept and is not a recommendation! In order to be useful, the City would need to break down these broad categories into more specific examples. For example, review by a specific board or commission could be identified as a base-line activity for a certain type of specific decision.</i></p>										
Citywide Decisions										
Mpls 5-Year Goals & Business Plans	B	B	B	B		B		B		
Mpls Ordinances, Policies, Regulations		M	O			B				
Mpls Comprehensive Plan & Zoning Code		B	M	B		B	M			
Community Decisions										
Small-Area & Corridor Plans		M	B	M			B		B	
Zoning Overlay Districts		M	B	M			B		B	
Community-Specific City Programs		M	B	M				B	B	B
Local Decisions										
NRP Distribution (per action plan)		M		M			B		M	B
Local Zoning Change or Variance		M	B	M		B			B	
Individual Development Project Decisions		M							B	

Recommendation 4: Develop accessible, consistent, two-way communication systems

Effective community engagement requires accessible, consistent two-way communication between the City and its increasingly diverse stakeholders. First of all, the City should provide clear, easily accessible (and multi-lingual) information on how to participate in City government that explains routine decision-making processes and identifies base-line CE opportunities for interested stakeholders. Building on summary recommendations 1, 2 and 3 above, this basic information should include:

- An explanation of the decision-making authority for different types of decisions
- A description of the base-line engagement opportunities for each type of decision
- A list of official advisory groups that explains their roles and responsibilities

The City should also provide current information on upcoming decisions and opportunities for engagement around these specific decisions. This frequently-updated information could include more detailed board, commission and committee calendars, as well as interactive capabilities that would allow stakeholders to search for upcoming decisions based on key words or subjects that interest them. These informational communication systems should also be coordinated with those of other local governmental jurisdictions (see recommendation 5, below).

In addition to the one-way, informational communication described above, the City should establish a standardized system to invite and capture community input, and most importantly, to integrate this input into its decision-making processes. Using the CE Process Model, the City could work with the community to develop two-way communication systems that are more user-friendly and accessible to stakeholders, and that take into consideration the reasons why people often find it difficult to participate in the City's current CE system, including language barriers or the difficulty of attending daytime public hearings and evening community meetings.

There are many methods the City can consider to increase public participation through improved two-way communication systems. One possibility is the implementation of an "online public-participation tool," an innovative approach that is being used increasingly by other governments to meet the involvement demands of the public and other stakeholders, while effectively managing the integration of their input into decision-making processes. Information on emerging public-participation technologies is included in the appendix to this report.

Recommendation 5: Coordinate planning and priority setting with other public jurisdictions

Given that all local government partners (city, county, parks, schools, libraries) seek input and participation from the same stakeholders – and that many issues of concern cross jurisdictional lines and therefore require collaborative solutions and decisions – it would clearly be beneficial to pool public resources and coordinate local community engagement activities.

This coordinated approach could range from simple procedural improvements, like publishing a comprehensive calendar of public community engagement activities, to more ambitious changes in practice, like convening a joint annual visioning and priority-setting process.

Some potential actions for consideration could include:

- Creating a common multi-jurisdictional public calendar of engagement events
- Publishing a multi-jurisdictional newsletter to residents that identifies major issues, decision-making timelines and opportunities to participate
- Sharing resources to jointly fund community organizations that have official roles in the community engagement system
- Share other governmental resources such as technical expertise, data, meeting support, communications and outreach capacity to support engagement activity
- Sharing information, and collaborating on the collection and dissemination of information, including announcements of upcoming engagement activities, the input gathered, and the results of that input on eventual decisions made
- Establishing a multi-jurisdictional roundtable that convenes representatives of each jurisdiction and meets consistently or as needed
- Coordinating the community engagement activities of the government jurisdictions, on an annual basis or as needed when multi-jurisdictional issues arise

The level of integration or collaboration will of course be up to the elected representatives of each jurisdiction to consider.

Next Steps

The City's response to these five summary recommendations is, of course, an opportunity for further community engagement. On the other hand, some of these recommendations may suggest implementation steps that would not require further engagement. As the Mayor and City Council consider these five summary recommendations, they will need to decide:

- Whether to consider directing staff to implement some of these recommendations without further community engagement;
- Whether some of these recommendations would benefit from further engagement before implementation and, if so, what that process should look like; and
- Whether the input summarized in Section II suggests other improvements to the City's community engagement system that should also be considered.

Finally, because the implementation of these recommendations could have budget implications, the staff work group recommends that the City finalize these implementation decisions in time to influence the City's 2008 operating budget. Ideally, the Mayor and Council would make any resource-related implementation decisions by the end of April 2007, so City departments can incorporate these decisions into their budget presentations to the Mayor during June and July.

This also suggests that any further community engagement activities designed to inform these decisions should be organized and carried out during the first quarter of 2007.