Section I: The Current Minneapolis CE System

Definition of Community Engagement

There are many possible definitions of the term "community engagement." John Persico and Peg Peck-Chapman, the consultants who worked with the City Communication Department in 2005 to develop the Community Engagement Process Model, observed that there is considerable confusion about what qualifies as community engagement and what does not. They concluded that the activities identified by both City staff and community stakeholders naturally fall into two categories: 1) ***engaging*** the community regarding a City decision, and 2) ***being involved*** in the community to deliver programs or services, volunteer, educate or build relationships. Based on this distinction the consultants worked with the Communication Department to arrive at the following definition, which we will use for the purpose of this report:

- ***Community engagement always involves an impending city government decision.***

Of course, while ***engaging*** members of the community in a decision-making process, the City may also ***be involved*** in activities that educate and build positive relationships, but the primary purpose of community engagement – as defined above – is ***to empower people to influence decisions that shape their city and their lives.***

Introduction of the Community Engagement Process Model

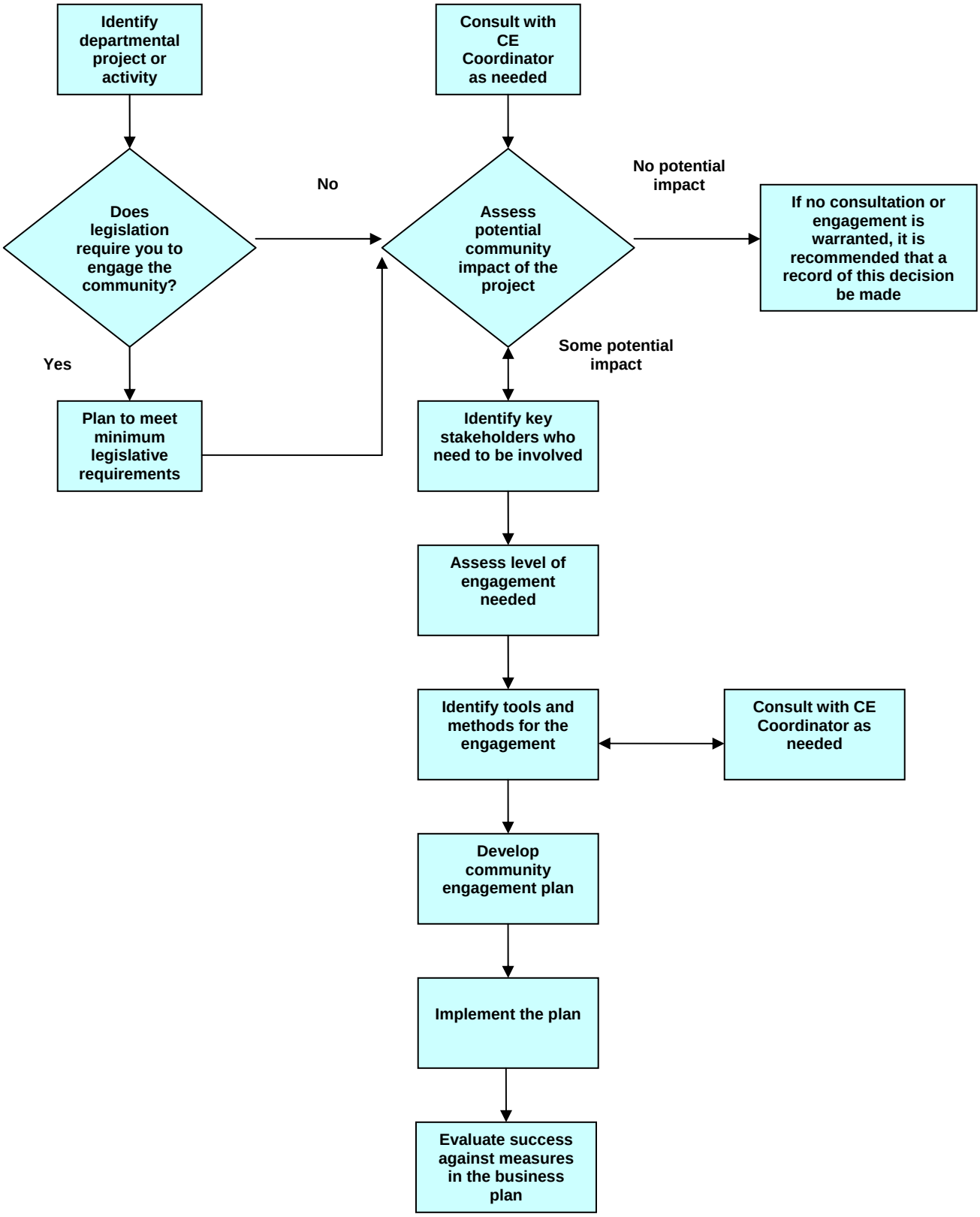
Using this definition of community engagement, Persico and Peck-Chapman developed the Minneapolis Community Engagement Process Model. The purpose of the model is to help City departments standardize their approach to planning CE activities around all kinds of decisions. The model encourages City departments to incorporate standardized engagement processes into their business practices. It also assists them to develop more meaningful, efficient and cost-effective community engagement activities, and to evaluate the effectiveness of their efforts.

The model was developed through a year-long review of existing models of local-government community engagement, discussions with City department representatives, and consultation with community leaders and advisors. It was an interactive process drawing on the experience and input of government and non-government practitioners and community stakeholders.

The City introduced the model in January 2006, and hired a new Community Engagement Coordinator who conducted introductory training sessions for staff in the spring and fall. This summer all City departments identified current CE activities and incorporated implementation of the model into their updated 5-year business plans. The Community Engagement Coordinator works with departments on an ongoing basis to customize and refine their engagement activities.

A flow chart illustrating the Community Engagement Process Model appears on the following page. The complete CE Process Model Guide Book is available on the City website at: http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/citywork/city-coordinator/communications/CE_Process_Model_GuideBk_2006.pdf

The Community Engagement Process Model



Description of Current CE Activities

While the introduction of the Community Engagement Process Model was a recent event, there are of course many ways the City of Minneapolis already engages the community and has for many years. In fact – with over 50 official boards and commissions, citizen participation contracts with over 70 neighborhood groups, and over 70 neighborhood action plans at various stages of development and implementation through the NRP – Minneapolis has one of the most extensive and elaborate community engagement systems in the country.

For some, Minneapolis is a city where these opportunities for involvement in decision making are well understood, but so numerous that they (and their organizations) can feel overwhelmed and ineffective. For others, just trying to figure out how to influence a particular public decision is so frustrating that they give up. In both cases, we miss the mark. Opportunities for meaningful involvement in important public decisions should be clear, predictable and accessible for every interested member of our community. This is our goal and guiding value.

The community engagement system in Minneapolis is very complex, partly because it involves many different groups and types of activities, and partly because the system itself and the groups and activities it includes are always changing. Like a hospital that remodels and adds a new wing every few years, the City's community engagement system has become a very confusing place. Even City employees struggle to understand it.

Like that growing hospital, we need to help people find their way around. But if we look more closely, we may also find that we need to reorganize or simplify the system to make it easier for everyone to understand and use. What follows is a description of the Minneapolis community engagement system – as it is stands today – in all its constantly-changing complexity.

Ten types of activity comprise the current Minneapolis community engagement system:

1. **Activities of Elected Officials and Their Offices**
2. **Standing Committees of the City Council**
3. **Formal Public Hearings of the City Council**
4. **Official Advisory Boards and Commissions**
5. **Temporary Advisory Groups or Committees**
6. **Citywide Communication and CE Activities**
7. **Citywide and Small-Area Planning Activities**
8. **Department-, Program- or Project-Specific Activities**
9. **Neighborhood Citizen Participation Contract Activities**
10. **The Neighborhood Revitalization Program (NRP)**

CE Activity 1: Activities of Elected Officials and Their Offices

The community engagement activities of elected officials may include visits to regularly-scheduled neighborhood or ward meetings; blogs, newsletters, email or other notices sent directly to constituents; special meetings or forums convened to discuss a particular issue or pending decision; constituent-relations and outreach activities conducted by office staff; door-knocking and election-related activities; and of course elections themselves, which could be considered the ultimate community engagement activity.

CE Activity 2: Standing Committees of the City Council

There are eight standing committees of the City Council, seven of which meet once during the two-week cycle prior to meetings of the full Council. These seven committees are Community Development; Health, Energy and Environment; Intergovernmental Relations; Public Safety and Regulatory Services; Transportation and Public Works; Ways and Means / Budget; and Zoning and Planning. The eighth standing committee, Claims, meets once each quarter. Three special standing committees of the City Council are convened as called by the Chair. They are Elections, Rules and Taxes. The Executive Committee, which considers appointments of department heads and other officials and negotiates labor contracts, generally meets on a bi-weekly basis.

Most City Council decisions are considered by at least one of these standing committees before coming to the full Council for final action. Although the City Council's meetings are also public and televised, there is seldom time allotted for public input or dialogue; this type of engagement is usually handled at the committee level rather than at meetings of the full City Council.

CE Activity 3: Formal Public Hearings of the City Council

The City Council is required to host formal public hearings for some decisions, including the adoption of the annual budget, applications for federal funding, and certain decisions concerning the sale and use of land. The Mayor and Council may choose to hold public hearings on other decisions as well. Public hearings usually have a formal structure designed for the one-way communication of community concerns and opinions to the Mayor and Council, and are not generally intended to be forums for discussion or collaborative decision making.

CE Activity 4: Official Advisory Boards and Commissions

There are also over 50 official boards and commissions, to which community members are appointed to advise the Mayor and City Council on a wide range of issues and decisions. Some of these, like the Planning Commission and the Capital Long-Range Improvements Committee, have well-defined functions and provide highly structured recommendations to the Mayor and Council that directly influence public decision making. Others, like the Senior Citizen Advisory Committee and Latino Advisory Committee, also provide input and recommendations on City decisions, but the process is not as clearly structured and varies widely depending on the composition and leadership of the group at a given time.

Finally, there are a number of independent and multi-jurisdictional boards and commissions, including the school, park and library boards, the Youth Coordinating Board, the Neighborhood Revitalization Program Policy Board and the Board of Estimate and Taxation. A complete list of current boards and commissions is included in the appendix to this report.

CE Activity 5: Temporary Advisory Groups or Committees

From time to time, the Mayor and City Council also establish temporary advisory committees to advise the City regarding a particular issue or decision, such as the selection of a department head or the establishment of a new policy or program. These groups are appointed by the Mayor and Council for a specific period of time, to influence a specific decision, and then disband.

CE Activity 6: Citywide Communication and CE Activities

In addition to working with individual departments to promote and facilitate use of the CE Process Model described above, the Communication Department also coordinates a number of citywide outreach and engagement activities, including a bi-annual resident survey and development of the increasingly interactive City of Minneapolis website. The website allows residents to sign up for automatic email updates on a growing range of topics, including the agendas and minutes of individual committees, boards and commissions. It can also be used to provide an online forum or survey on a current topic or pending public decision. The City is actively exploring increased use of interactive "e-government" technology.

CE Activity 7: Citywide and Small-Area Planning

The Planning Division of the Department of Community Planning and Economic Development (CPED) works directly with residents, businesses and community organizations on a wide range of citywide and small-area planning activities. For example, CPED is currently facilitating community engagement in small-area planning activities in Downtown and Uptown and on West Broadway Avenue, while developing the citywide community engagement process for the ten-year update of the citywide comprehensive plan ("The Minneapolis Plan") in 2007-2008.

CE Activity 8: Department-, Program- or Project-Specific Activities

Many City departments – including Police, Public Works, Regulatory Services, CPED, and Health and Family Support – regularly engage the community in decision making relative to specific programs and projects. For example, Public Works regularly provides public notices and participates in community meetings regarding planned street and infrastructure improvements. Regulatory Services facilitates public engagement on a wide range of site-specific licensing and environmental issues. The Police Department convenes Precinct Advisory Committees and staffs the Police Community Relations Council.

In addition to the official advisory boards and commissions described above, many departments also convene temporary or on-call advisory committees for specific purposes, such as the multi-cultural advisory committee recently convened by the Department of Health and Family Services to advise the Public Health Advisory Committee on the development of its urban health agenda.

CE Activity 9: Neighborhood Citizen Participation Contracts

In addition to the department-sponsored activities described above, CPED also administers citizen participation contracts with 77 neighborhood organizations, and works with these organizations to engage the community around a variety of development-related decisions.

These contracts identify specific types of decisions for which the City provides neighborhood groups with notification, and a 45-day review period, before taking action. These contracts do not obligate neighborhood groups – or the City – to engage the community regarding other kinds

of City decisions. The 2006 Citizen Participation Program guidelines are included in the appendix to this report.

CE Activity 10: The Neighborhood Revitalization Program

The Neighborhood Revitalization Program (NRP) is a 20-year program designed to revitalize Minneapolis neighborhoods by engaging residents and local government in the development and implementation of neighborhood action plans, primarily funded by tax-increment revenue from downtown redevelopment projects of the 1970s and 1980s. While the NRP has increased the organizational capacity of neighborhoods – and has engaged residents in the development and implementation of local action plans – the program has not generally focused on engaging the community in broader, citywide decisions such as policies, programs or budget priorities.

When CE Activities are Used

In order to understand when different activities are currently used to engage the community in City decisions, it helps to recognize that not all decisions are the same. Depending on the type of decision, some CE activities are more appropriate than others. For example, a citywide decision like the annual operating budget might involve very broad engagement, while a request from a local café to permit sidewalk seating might only involve only the residents of the immediate area. For the purpose of this report, we have grouped City decisions into three categories:

Citywide Decisions

- City of Minneapolis five-year goals and strategic plans
- City of Minneapolis ordinances, policies and regulations
- City of Minneapolis comprehensive plan and zoning code
- City of Minneapolis capital and operating budgets
- Citywide projects *(wireless internet access, 311, etc.)*

Community Decisions

- Small-area, multi-neighborhood or corridor planning
- Multi-neighborhood projects *(Midtown Exchange, 35W Access, etc.)*
- Community-specific zoning and other regulations *(districts, zoning overlays, etc.)*
- Community-specific policies or programs *(affecting seniors, immigrants, etc.)*

Local Decisions

- Neighborhood-level planning, including NRP action plans
- Site- and project-specific zoning and development approvals *(within one neighborhood)*
- Block or neighborhood-level project or program funding *(by the City)*

The chart on the following page indicates how frequently each of the ten CE activities outlined above is currently used in the process of making each category of City decision.

How Frequently Current CE Activities Are Used

Decision Type: / *Activity Type:*	***Citywide Decision***	***Community Decision***	***Local Decision***
Activities of Elected Officials and Offices	**Sometimes** by choice of an elected official	**Sometimes** by choice of an elected official	**Sometimes** by choice of an elected official
Standing Committees of the City Council	**Frequently** required; sometimes by choice	**Frequently** required; sometimes by choice	**Frequently** required; sometimes by choice
Formal Public Hearings of the City Council	**Frequently** required; sometimes by choice	**Sometimes** used by choice	**Rarely** used to inform local decisions
Standing Advisory Brds. and Commissions	**Sometimes** required; sometimes by choice	**Rarely** used to inform community decisions	**Rarely** used to inform local decisions
Temporary Advisory Groups or Committees	**Sometimes** used by choice	**Sometimes** used by choice	**Rarely** used to inform local decisions
Citywide Communication and CE Activities	**Sometimes** required; sometimes by choice	**Rarely** used to inform community decisions	**Rarely** used to inform local decisions
Citywide and Small-Area Planning Activities	**Sometimes** required; sometimes by choice	**Frequently** required; sometimes by choice	**Sometimes** used by choice
Department-, Program- or Project- Specific Activities	**Rarely** used to inform citywide decisions	**Sometimes** used by choice	**Sometimes** required; sometimes by choice
Citizen Participation Contract Activities	**Rarely** used to inform citywide decisions	**Sometimes** used by choice	**Sometimes** required; sometimes by choice
NRP Program Activities	**Rarely** used to inform citywide decisions	**Sometimes** used by choice	**Sometimes** required; sometimes by choice

When reviewing the chart above, two observations leap out:

- **There is a general logic to the current system:** Citywide decisions are ***more likely*** to involve formal public hearings, official advisory bodies and citywide communication and engagement activities, while local decisions are ***more likely*** to involve only project-specific and neighborhood-level community engagement activities. That makes sense.

- **Beyond this general logic, nothing is certain:** Depending on the category of decision, each of the engagement activities listed above may occur frequently, sometimes or rarely, ***but it is very difficult for the public to predict which activities will actually occur***, which makes the City's current CE system difficult to understand. That is a problem.

So, how well are these current CE activities working to engage the community in important City decisions? Given this second observation, it is not surprising that many of the stakeholders who have participated in forums, studies or interviews on the subject of community engagement in recent years report that the City's current system is very confusing and difficult to predict.

The following section of this report summarizes the observations and recommendations the City has received during the past four years from a wide variety of interested stakeholders.