

Public Participation Program

The update to the General Plan offers an excellent opportunity to define a positive and proactive vision for the City of Woodland that will guide future planning decisions. The key to developing such a vision is an effective public participation program that creates confidence in the planning process, promotes broad-based understanding, and reflects the interests and needs of the community. A collaborative relationship between the general public, community representatives, the planning team, and decision-makers are all components of a successful planning process.

In order to create a cohesive vision for the City of Woodland, the public participation program will include a multi-faceted approach over a 14-month period. The goal is to engage a broad constituency of the city's population and interests. To maximize inclusion within the practical limits of time, budget, tight schedule, and the City's population size, the program proposes a mix of techniques that offer opportunities for the entire city to provide input during the planning process. This program will engage local organizations and groups that are valued by the community, using imagery and graphic tools to facilitate understanding. It will employ techniques that effectively foster input to assure participants that their voices have been heard while building a constituency for the City's future policies and programs.

Program Objectives

Because of the potential wide-ranging and long-term impacts, it is important to facilitate a broad range of public participation. The public participation process will offer a variety of means for residents and businesses to express their views. The program will reach out to all community members. It will also serve as an educational forum, providing an understanding of the inter-relationship between long-range planning and its implications for the City. Understanding and addressing the public's views on critical issues will be an essential part of the General Plan Update. The General Plan Update public participation program will focus on three broad objectives:

1. Educate and inform the community about the planning process.
2. Solicit feedback at key stages through a variety of techniques to ensure broad participation, and provide opportunities for discussion and input on growth and development preferences, and potential environmental affects.
3. Build community buy in, and promote confident decision-making by elected officials.

Public Participation Program Components

City Council/Planning Commission Meetings and Joint Study Sessions

The City Council and Planning Commission are ultimately responsible for adopting the Plan. In order to keep City officials engaged in the process and ensure that it is on the right track, it will be important to hold periodic “check-ins” with these decision-makers. The Scope of Work includes a total of 13 Planning Commission/City Council meetings/study sessions/hearings at key stages in the process.

General Plan Steering Committee Meetings

Throughout the General Plan Update, a steering committee representing a variety of community interests will help guide the planning process. This committee, appointed by the City Council, is comprised of 17 members. While the meetings anticipated for this group will be open to the public, the forum is designed to focus on formulating policies and providing direction developed from the input generated through the community workshops described below. A total of seven meetings are provided in the Scope of Work with the Steering Committee.

Community Workshops

Citywide workshops will be conducted five times during the General Plan Update process to synthesize issues, visions, and policies from the community at-large. The proposed workshops topics are:

- **Workshop #1 and #2:** Community Visioning
- **Workshop #3 and #4:** Land Use Alternatives, Preferred Land Use Plan
- **Workshop #5:** Draft General Plan and Draft EIR Open House

Scheduling two workshops on each of the first two topics (#1 and #2 on visioning; #3 and #4 on alternatives) is intended to provide the public with more choice and flexibility in participation. The format and content for workshops 1 and 2 will be the same, and the format and content for 3 and 4 will be the same; the difference will be when and where they are held. We suggest that one be held on a weekday evening and one on a Saturday morning. They may also be held at different locations in the city so as to be convenient for residents in different neighborhoods.

In addition to these general citywide workshops, a scoping meeting for the Environmental Impact Report will be held (likely in conjunction with a Planning Commission meeting) as well as a Community Housing Forum, focused on housing provider issues addressed in the Housing Element Update.

Each workshop will be structured as an event for the entire family. Techniques to engage participants, maximize opportunities for discussion, and incorporate citizen input into the planning process may include:

- Large-scale base maps or aerials for recording community issues, visions, and preferred options.
- Small table or “break-out” sessions addressing issues, visions and land use options, as well as candidate policies and implementation programs.
- Essays, note cards, and other comment forms that enable written communication on visions, planning issues, and reactions to planning options.
- Score cards on which individual participants, appointed delegates, and/or small groups can “vote” for planning alternatives.
- “Open House” forums, where community members can view materials and interact with planners and consultants.

Stakeholder Meetings

One-on-one interviews with stakeholders are an important and effective way to gather information and perspective, since often people are much more candid interfacing in a small group. Interviewers can ask about major issues of concern, deal-breakers, desirables, and the political factors that may come into play, in order to discover the most critical issues for the City. Stakeholders will include community leaders, property owners, environmental groups, and/or some key public agency representatives. For the General Plan Update, approximately 15 meetings with stakeholders (with one or three participants at each meeting) were held over a two-day period on February 7 and 8, 2013. The results of the interviews will be summarized in a short report and made available to the public and decision-makers.

Citywide Mail-in Survey

A citywide mail-in survey is an economical complement to the community workshops that provides an opportunity for input from individuals unable to attend workshops. The survey will be mailed to every household in the City in conjunction with a General Plan Newsletter, and will be bilingual English/Spanish. The survey will be designed in consultation with City staff. Generally, it will help identify the values and visions for how Woodland’s future. Responses will be tabulated, summarized, and presented in a report, and summarized at subsequent community workshops and the project website.

Workshop Toolkits for Additional Key Group Outreach/Neighborhood Briefings

Workshop “toolkits” (PowerPoint presentations and boards of key wall graphics from public workshops) will be available to City staff so that they can give additional presentations on the General Plan to other groups and neighborhood associations as requested, providing additional avenues for public input. These will be available for the visioning and alternatives workshop stages. During the planning process, staff-led meetings with interest groups and organizations (such as school PTAs, the Chamber of Commerce, etc.) as well as meetings with other commissions are anticipated as part of this outreach effort.

Website

A project website will be created and managed by the City to expand access to information about the General Plan Update, linked to the City’s home page. Dyett & Bhatia will prepare reports in a web-compatible format to be posted on the website. The site will also act as a record of the process, providing meeting dates, agendas and meeting notes in a central, accessible location. Project memoranda and milestone documents will be uploaded to the project website to be accessed by interested citizens as well. The website will also feature a comment form, where interested community members can contribute their thoughts, ideas, and questions directly at any stage during the planning process. Visitors can also sign up to join the project email list, so that they may be informed of upcoming meetings and the availability of new materials.

Outreach to the Hispanic Community and Disenfranchised Groups

As Woodland’s population is increasingly diverse, traditional public engagement methods must be reconsidered for their inclusivity and effectiveness. Engaging the entire community is critical to creating a truly effective and representative General Plan for which all residents can feel pride and ownership.

Throughout the General Plan Update process, the public outreach and engagement strategy will be geared toward involving the Hispanic community, other ethnic minorities, low-income residents, and others without a tradition of participation in community planning processes. Key tenets of this approach will include:

- **Leveraging existing community leaders.** People are more likely to participate in events if asked or invited to do so by community leaders that they know and trust. General Plan Steering Committee members can be the “front line” in reaching out to groups they represent or with whom they are involved. Other local leaders who may not be on the Steering Committee but who the City knows (religious leaders, service providers, nonprofit organization representatives, etc.) should be directly contacted by the City, educated about the General Plan and its importance, and asked to spread the word. These leaders can also provide invaluable information about relevant information, appropriate formats for the meetings and materials, and logistics that will ensure outreach will be successful.
- **Providing bilingual participation opportunities.** The most broad-reaching outreach effort—the community survey that will be mailed to all addresses in Woodland—will be translated into Spanish. This initial mailing also provides an introduction to the process, explains the purpose of the General Plan, and announces the community visioning workshops. Having a direct mailer sent to each home in two languages, with an opportunity to fill out a survey on one’s own time in one’s own language, can help build confidence and inclusion in the process early on.

- **Providing interpretation at community workshops.** We strongly recommend that the City provide simultaneous interpretation at community workshops. The City would be responsible for providing headsets and a simultaneous translator. Dyett & Bhatia can provide a Spanish-speaking table facilitator if necessary; partnering with community volunteers is another way of ensuring adequate interpretation capacity that simultaneously builds community buy-in to the process. Notes from table discussions should also be recorded in Spanish so that participants can see and understand that their ideas are being recorded in their own words. Comments will be translated back into English for inclusion in the summary reports.
- **Focusing on visual representation.** A picture is worth a thousand words. In order to reach a diverse community at a single meeting, it is important that meeting materials focus on visual representation of concepts and ideas so that they are easily understood by a range of participants. This allows many community members from different backgrounds to share the process, and also reduces the need for extensive translation.
- **Conducting neighborhood-level meetings.** Despite broad outreach, some members of the community will not feel comfortable attending a large workshop at City Hall or at a location outside of their immediate neighborhood. By providing Workshop Toolkits (described above), staff will be able to present the same concepts and ideas to smaller groups, at familiar and convenient locations dispersed across the city (elementary schools, churches, etc.). Staff may want to conduct short briefings to small neighborhood groups at other interim stages in the process (i.e., in between regularly-scheduled community workshops or City Council meetings) in order to keep groups informed and maintain continuity. Distrust and disengagement can develop when long gaps occur between workshops and community members who may have participated for the first time feel as though their input is being ignored or forgotten.
- **Maintaining ongoing flexibility in approach.** It is important to recognize that each community and each process is unique. While we can plan and prepare inclusive outreach methods up front to the greatest extent possible, we must be flexible and adaptable in our approach—recognize what has worked and what hasn't, and be willing to change our methodology as needed to improve our engagement efficacy, within the bounds of the project schedule and budget.
- **Paying attention to logistics.** Small details can make a big difference. We encourage the City to provide food at workshops (and to advertise as such in meeting announcements), to explicitly state that children may attend, and to choose workshop locations that are centrally located and easily accessible by transit.