Early Involvement

Background

Since 1973, Oregon has maintained a strong statewide program for land use planning. The foundation of that program is a set of 19 statewide planning goals. The goals express the state’s policies on land use and related topics, such as citizen involvement, housing, and natural resources.

In 1975, West Linn adopted its Comprehensive Plan in response to the statewide planning goals. Goal 1 of the Comprehensive Plan is for citizen involvement and ensures opportunity for citizens to be involved in all phases of the planning process. Goal 1 sets specific goals, policies and recommended action measures for citizen involvement. The Committee for Citizen Involvement (CCI) monitors and encourages citizen involvement.

The Comprehensive Plan provides the basis for other plans, ordinances, and other implementing documents that set forth more detailed direction regarding specific activities and requirements. All City plans and implementing ordinances must be consistent with the Plan.

The Community Development Code (CDC) codifies citizen involvement in CDC Chapter 99. The two opportunities for early citizen involvement in quasi-judicial land-use decisions are at the pre-application conference and at the neighborhood meeting as required for certain applications in CDC 99.030 and 99.038, respectively.

In year, the Planning Director administrated policy for citizens to attend pre-application conference meetings as provided by 99.030(B)(8). The purpose of the conference is for the pre-applicant to discuss a concept plan with staff as it relates to existing conditions and learn the applicable criteria and approval process.

The neighborhood meeting is an opportunity for citizens to know the concept of the proposed development presented by the applicant and give input. After coordinating a date with the affected neighborhood association(s), the applicant mails a letter to the officers of the neighborhood associations whose boundaries contain all or part of the site of the proposed development and all property owners and neighborhood associations within 500 feet of the site inviting them to the meeting. The meeting is required before the application may be filed.

The CCI identified early involvement as a problem area of the land-use process based on comments from citizens and the collective experience of its members and who they represent and the staff liaison. Citizens will be empowered to participate once they have an understanding of the process and timeline showing opportunities for citizens; and help identifying approval criteria related to specific issues or concerns they have.

Education components
CCI suggests education of citizens, neighborhood associations, citizen advisory groups, appropriate staff members and applicants in the early phases of the land-use process will help avoid misunderstandings, improve citizen participation and result in better applications.

Prepare a pamphlet or quick reference guide and webpage on goals, roles and responsibilities addressing the Pre-application Conference and land use process steps and opportunities for citizen engagement.

Develop a training program offered on a regular basis.

Devise a method to track projects, for example, using a project dashboard.

Consider how to provide a personal contact for information and guidance to citizens. Is this the role of planning staff and if it is, how can it evolve to a relationship of trust with citizens?

**Administrative components**

Write a mission statement for the Planning Department.

Develop a statement to be read at the beginning of the Pre-application Conference describing the purpose and goals of the conference and the roles and responsibilities of participants.

Evaluate the required mailed notice to determine needed improvements for better understanding by the public of the process and opportunities for engagement and support.

??? On Summary table, “Notice to affected properties before first NA meeting.” ??? Does this refer to the notice mailed by the applicant about the neighborhood meeting???

??? Could educational material, for example, “Tips for Testimony”, “Specific Approval Criteria” and/or NA information be included with the mailed notice???

Improve the project page for a specific application on the website so citizens can track it throughout the review process.

Give NAs the option to form a Project Coordinating Committee (see Changes to the App. Draft).

**Code Amendments**

Provide a copy of the Neighborhood Plan for all Neighborhood Associations whose boundaries contain all or part of the proposed development and the Plan for any NA whose boundary is within the mailing area boundary, presently 500ft. CDC 99.030(B)(5)

Expand the required notice mailing area(s) for Class A and Class B, presently 500ft and 300ft, respectively. CDC 99.080
Require two neighborhood meetings (See Changes to the Application draft)