

GOAL 1: CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT

STATEWIDE PLANNING GOAL 1 CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT: *To develop a citizen involvement program that insures the opportunity for citizens to be involved in all phases of the planning process.*

BACKGROUND

The Importance of Citizen Involvement

Localities in Oregon are required to provide a variety of meaningful opportunities and options for active participation by residents, business owners, private organizations and partnering agencies in the preparation of—or amendments to—a community’s comprehensive plan.

Citizen involvement is:

- Required by State law;
- A means to assure planning efforts are worthwhile and meaningful endeavors; and
- Key to informing local leaders who make critical decisions (e.g., long-range planning, infrastructure investments, etc.) affecting the community’s livability and economic vitality.

Robust public input supports effective and efficient governance by revealing public opposition for initiatives that local leaders might otherwise assume are desired or unopposed. Not only must a community’s leaders provide the public with a chance to view and respond to planning documents and studies, they ALSO must proactively seek citizen involvement.

Likewise, long-range/comprehensive planning documents often are used to inform investments in infrastructure and to guide decisions like financing debt or undertaking major policy initiatives. Governmental activities could create economic implications or impact payrolls and taxes—tools sometimes used to achieve the goals and objectives of a community. Therefore, “citizen involvement” also must extend to community businesses and industries.

Channels and methods for involving residents often also can be effectively used to reach businesses and industries, as well as governmental, public utility, and transportation providers.

An Overview of Local Citizen Involvement and Vision Work

Local business-owners and residents living both inside and outside the City’s urban growth boundary (city limits) share a strong sense of ownership of Sisters. The City and rural community—known collectively as “Sisters Country”—is home to native-born residents, long-time residents and relative newcomers. Historically, this diversity has engendered robust community interest and involvement in land-use decisions and proposed municipal investments. The most recent community visioning process has underscored the need and benefits of strong community outreach throughout Sisters Country.

The City formally adopted “Community Vision” action plans in 1999, 2007 and 2019. The 1999 and 2007 plans were relatively successful in informing important policy decisions. The most recent community-wide visioning campaign began in Winter 2017-2018.

Over the course of a year, about 2,000 area citizens offered input to inform the 2019 Sisters Country Community Vision (SCCV). This collaborative, multi-jurisdictional effort was spearheaded by The City, Deschutes County, and the Central Oregon Intergovernmental Council (COIC) with support and

assistance from several partners, including Economic Development for Central Oregon (EDCO), Oregon's Kitchen Table, local non-profits like Citizens4Community and Age Friendly Sisters Country and many area residents and business owners.

The 2019 SCCV Action Plan (available at <https://sistersvision.org>) lays out tasks to be undertaken by governmental agencies, taxing districts and private organizations to improve the connectivity, livability, prosperity and resilience of Sisters Country. A Vision Implementation Team (VIT) will help ensure execution of the Action Plan; and the plan requires broad citizen involvement over several years.

(To increase public participation and foster implementation of the community's Vision, the 2019 Sisters Country Community Vision and Action Plan is hereby adopted by reference into the Comprehensive Plan.)

Expanding Outreach and Awareness Efforts

Development of the 2019 Vision and Action Plan involved several different channels and tools for citizen outreach. Methods included information kiosks, email blasts, small-format local meetings, community-wide forums, volunteer workshops, online surveys, and 80-plus direct interviews with local residents.

During this period surrounding the Visioning work, the City also made other notable efforts to boost citizen involvement and build more public awareness of City activities and proposed actions. Those accomplishments include modernizing the City website and expanding public access to electronic notices and public meeting agendas.

The City also subscribed to a code publisher to maintain its municipal and development codes by an efficient, independent server; and it partnered with the State to implement ACCELA—an online land use and building permit processing platform which speeds access to key information and improves responsiveness to citizen requests.

City staff, the City Council and its appointed bodies continue to search for new opportunities to improve citizen involvement and gather public feedback. The City continually seeks to increase involvement by youth and encourages public participation and inclusion from diverse populations that do not ordinarily participate in the public discourse.

CITY OF SISTERS PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT GOAL: *The City endeavors to offer a wide variety of traditional and contemporary tools and opportunities that enable inclusion of a diverse population of residents, business owners, private organizations and partner agencies located inside and outside City limits to participate in all land use processes.*

OBJECTIVES AND POLICIES

OBJECTIVE 1.1: To maintain an effective Citizen Involvement Program and recognize an official body—a Committee for Citizen Involvement (CCI)—to be responsible for overseeing and regularly reviewing the effectiveness of the program in order to grow public awareness and participation.

POLICIES:

- 1.1.1 The Citizen Involvement Program will be directed by the City’s Planning Commission, sitting as the Committee for Citizen Involvement. The Planning Commission shall seek multiple methods to support and cultivate additional, new and ever-expanding citizen involvement opportunities including working directly with private organizations to amplify opportunities for involvement.
- 1.1.2 The Planning Commission shall annually evaluate the City’s public involvement tools and processes and report its findings in writing to the City Council along with recommendations as appropriate for improving the program.
- 1.1.3 The level of funding and human resources allocated to the Citizen Involvement Program should be an amount that will make citizen involvement and outreach an integral part of the planning process.
- 1.1.4 The Vision Implementation Team of the Sisters Country Community Vision shall remain active; it shall monitor and evaluate progress of the Action Plan; and it also shall recommend and document citizen outreach strategies that it deems necessary and that it uses (successfully or not) to remain a body truly reflective of the community at large.

OBJECTIVE 1.2: To recognize the need to use a variety of traditional and contemporary communication tools and channels in the Citizen Involvement Program—communication methods that will reach diverse audiences and drive greater awareness and participation in all phases of the planning process.

POLICIES:

- 1.2.1 Information about the City’s planning activities and notices of upcoming meetings shall be maintained on the City’s website and distributed via a variety of outlets and methods, including non-traditional methods that might be more successful at reaching underrepresented or less frequently involved members of the public (in accordance with Connected Strategy 4 of the 2019 SCCV Action Plan).
- 1.2.2 The Planning Commission and other City officials shall actively seek opportunities to personally present planning process or specific project information to community organizations, especially opportunities that will reach historically lesser-involved residents.

- 1.2.3 Dedicated web-based resources will provide documents and information about current and historic planning processes; and, whenever possible, clear, layman's explanations or instructions will be added to promote user-ship and better utilization and understanding of these resources (in accordance with Policy 1.3.1 below).
- 1.2.4 Citizen assistance in the preparation of each phase of the planning process shall be actively encouraged; and strategies to reach underrepresented or marginally-involved populations shall be implemented.
- 1.2.5 Planning Commission members and other City officials shall reach out to and encourage qualified individuals from historically lesser-involved populations to apply for vacancies on the City's advisory bodies, not only to foster vibrant and diverse perspectives within these bodies but also to encourage bridge-building to other voices in those populations.

OBJECTIVE 1.3: To present technical information that serves as the foundation of the plan in an understandable form.

POLICIES:

- 1.3.1 Information necessary to reach policy decisions shall be available in a simplified and understandable form at City Hall, on the City's website and via other resources as appropriate.
- 1.3.2 Upon written request, assistance in interpreting and using technical information shall be provided in a timely manner.
- 1.3.3 Recommendations resulting from the Citizen Involvement Program shall be retained and made available for public assessment.
- 1.3.4 Citizens who have participated in this program shall receive a response from policy-makers. The rationale used to reach land-use policy decisions shall be available in the form of a written record.

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