

City of Wheat Ridge Community Involvement Strategy

City of Wheat Ridge City Council and staff are committed to a culture of meaningful public participation and community involvement. Effective public participation provides decision makers with perspectives and opinions shared by the community and seeks to ensure all voices are heard. The Community Involvement Strategy provides a framework to ensure active, consistent and balanced participation and public engagement in decision making processes.

Guiding Principles

- Residents affected by an issue or initiative will have the opportunity to participate and have their say
- Residents can have their say in a manner that is convenient for them. This means barriers to participation should be removed to the greatest degree possible by meeting residents where they are; online, at existing gatherings and in places where they move as part of their daily lives, in addition to designated public forums
- Residents have various needs in order to be able to have their say. This means needs such as childcare, interpretation, nontraditional schedules and cultural norms must be considered as factors in the community involvement process
- Residents want to have their say in various ways. Not all residents are comfortable speaking in front of an audience and their opinions and perspectives are valid regardless of how they speak up

Levels of Community Involvement

The Involve Wheat Ridge Community Involvement Strategy acknowledges three levels of participation:

1. Inform/Educate/Celebrate

Promise: We will provide the community with balanced, accurate and objective information. We will answer questions and keep the community informed.

Inform/Educate when: Contemplating temporary changes in service or facilities, or when the change is unlikely to affect the quality of life of Wheat Ridge residents, when change is occurring as a result of a plan or strategy that has been adopted, to correct misperceptions or in the case of normal day-to-day business assigned to staff.

Tools & Tactics: Communication tools including City's website, social media, public notices, posters, press releases, announcements, e-newsletters, signage, videos and white papers. Can also include information tables, presentations to groups, engagement webpage for easy sharing of information and public open houses.

Example A: The 2020 Census is coming and Wheat Ridge is committed to educating and informing residents about the safety of taking the census, the significance of the census and the importance of being counted. The City's engagement practice could involve presentations in the community, signage, the dissemination of promotional material, promotion on social media and a page on the engagement site where residents can post questions and receive answers about the census.

Example B: Wadsworth is being widened. Wheat Ridge is committed to educating and informing residents about the lane shifts that will be in place, that businesses will be open and

how to use the new Continuous Flow Intersections. In addition to the tactics listed above, the City's engagement practice could involve a question and answer forum on the engagement site.

2. Consult

Promise: The community's comments and feedback will be considered in the decision making process.

Consult when: Input or feedback from the community would be helpful in determining alternatives, when the organization is considering a change in services or there is a need to understand community desires.

Tools and Tactics: Online engagement activities including surveys, polls and virtual public hearings, public meetings and open houses, interactive activities where the public can show a preference (i.e. Chips in a bucket, sticker dots on a picture)

Example A: The City is recruiting a new police chief and will consult with the public on the desirable qualities of the next chief. The City could conduct a survey, focus groups and develop an engagement site, asking questions about the qualities of the perfect chief for Wheat Ridge. Results will be considered throughout the interview process. The public may also be involved in the final interview stages by attending a forum with final candidates. A survey could be administered to seek the preference of attendees and feedback would be considered in the selection of the final candidate.

Example B: The City is designing a streetscape and will consult the public on their visual preferences. The City could conduct an open house and host similar activities online gather feedback on a variety of design options.

3. Involve

Promise: To work directly with the community throughout a process to ensure that the public's concerns, aspirations and desires are understood and considered. Feedback contributes broadly to the outcome.

Involve when: The issue affects or has the potential to affect a significant number of residents, has a lasting impact on property, community ownership is necessary, during the development of strategic or comprehensive plans, the initiative creates or significantly changes public amenities, the issue has the potential to significantly alter service levels.

Tools and Tactics: Convene a steering committee or task force that includes residents and community members, design charrettes, online engagement activities including forums, Q&A, storytelling.

Example: The City is updating the 44th Avenue subarea plan. Residents and other stakeholders will be invited to participate in a year long process involving multiple stages and milestones. The public will be invited to participate in wide range of on-going activities, including small group meetings, open houses, surveys, and scenario planning. In-person meetings will be complimented with online activities for those that choose to participate virtually.

Polices and Guidelines for notification

Currently, the Wheat Ridge Charter and or Code of Laws specifies public notification and engagement in specific circumstances and within a certain proximity of the location of issue. By way of example, a neighborhood meeting is required prior to 1) a zone change, 2) a special use permit or 3) a concept plan

for land over 10 acres in size, the notification of which is mailed to land owners and tenants within 600 feet (Chapter 26). There are several other examples of specific cases in which notice is required to land owners and/or tenants, such as related to public hearings or street width designation. Important to the Community Involvement Strategy is the acknowledgement that engagement efforts will always satisfy those required by the Charter and Code. In order to best serve the public, a goal of the Community Involvement Strategy is to develop guidelines for notification and involvement that mirror best practices for City-driven initiatives.

Diversity, Inclusion and Equity (DEI)

As referenced in the Guiding Principles, providing equitable access for residents to have their say is important. Guidelines must be developed based on Wheat Ridge's characteristics and attributes so that decisions around translation, interpretation, facilitation techniques, meeting locations, child care offerings, catering options etc. can be carefully considered per outreach initiative. This involves a deep dive into Wheat Ridge's demographics and training to understand typical behaviors, cultural norms and barriers.

Staffing Structure

A recommendation of the 2019 Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy is the addition of two positions for the purpose of conducting a neighborhood planning and engagement effort. As community involvement transcends traditional departments and work groups, it is important that staff tasked with engaging on the neighborhood level understand the totality of the issues and initiatives that interest the community. Therefore, the neighborhood planning and engagement staff should lead a City-wide task force that includes members of each department along with the City's communications manager and digital communications specialist.

Members of the task force will act as liaisons to each department and workgroup. They will bring issues affecting the public to the task force for consideration of a public process. Each public process will be vetted by the task force, and an engagement plan will be developed to be led either by the neighborhood engagement staff or department representative. Communications staff will assist with the development and implementation of a communications strategy.

In the case of each issue or initiative, the task force will:

- Define the issue/problem/initiative
- Define the stakeholders
- Define the decision makers
- Determine the appropriate level of community involvement based on the spectrum (Inform/Educate, Consult, Involve) and how the involvement will affect the outcome
- Determine the engagement plan, assigning roles and responsibilities to members of the task force
- Launch the plan

Training and Educational Resources

The [International Association of Public Participation \(IAP2\)](#) is a worldwide resource for training and development in the public engagement space. The three levels of engagement for Wheat Ridge are

based on IAP2's spectrum of public participation as is the online engagement tool, Engagement HQ. Members of the task force and others in the organization will benefit from IAP2's Foundations in Public Participation training where tools, techniques and strategies for engagement are covered in depth. As every employee in an IAP2 member organization has access to online resources, webinars and local events, it is recommended that the City become a member and members of the Task Force become actively engaged.

Online Community Engagement

The City has selected two online solutions for community engagement.

Wheat Ridge Speaks provides residents the opportunity to review presentations and provide virtual comments on land use cases as if they were in attendance at a Planning Commission or City Council public hearing. Comments are entered into the public hearing record and elected officials must review all comments prior to voting on a land use case. Wheat Ridge Speaks is managed by Community Development staff. It would be possible, at Council's direction, to expand the use of Wheat Ridge Speaks in the future to allow public comment on all public hearing agenda items.

What's Up Wheat Ridge an online community engagement space owned by Bang the Table using the Engagement HQ platform. On this site, residents can contribute to a public process, much as if they were in attendance at a public meeting. Tools include the ability to ask and answer questions, provide input in narrative form, complete a survey, take a poll, drop pins on maps, upload videos and photographs and more. Involve Wheat Ridge will be managed by the Community Involvement task force, led by the neighborhood engagement specialist. This platform can be utilized for a variety of planning efforts and special projects.