

# Neighborhood Participation Program (NPP) Scope and Schedule

Prepared by the New Orleans City Planning Commission  
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## **Overview:**

The City Planning Commission has worked towards establishing methods of formalized, effective civic engagement since the 1990s when it was proposed as part of early Master Planning efforts. There has been considerable public and private research into best practices and how they may be applied to a New Orleans model. Post-Hurricane Katrina rebuilding efforts galvanized neighborhood-level civic engagement and led to a voter-approved City Charter amendment that mandated a formal system of neighborhood participation in public processes. Now, the City Council has asked the City Planning Commission to develop a sensible model. This model should focus on information sharing with neighborhoods and other interested stakeholders about Master Plan amendments, zoning changes, conditional uses, variances and the Capital Improvement Program.. It should allow for clear methods of communication with city agencies and reduce contentious wrangling. Over the next 6 months, the City Planning Commission will analyze and synthesize previous civic participation models, conduct a series of public meetings to gather broad feedback, and make a recommendation to the City Council on an effective, cost-conscious model of civic engagement in planning and land use decision making for New Orleans.

## **City Council Resolution 10-412:**

*According to Section 5-411 of the Home Rule Charter, "The City shall establish by ordinance a system for organized and effective neighborhood participation in land use decisions and other issues that affect quality of life. It shall provide for timely notification to a neighborhood of any proposed Land Use Action affecting the neighborhood; it shall also provide the opportunity for meaningful neighborhood review of and comment on such proposals. In addition, it shall provide the opportunity for meaningful neighborhood participation in the formulation of the Master Plan or any amendment thereto."*

To comply with this mandate, and to move ahead with recommendations of Chapter 15, Community Participation Program of the recently adopted Master Plan, the New Orleans City Council introduced Resolution 10-439 on October 21, 2010 directing the City Planning Commission to "*prepare and recommend an ordinance informed by the public that establishes a system for neighborhood participation.*" During preparation for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Plan or the Master Plan, the City Planning Commission proved again to be an effective vehicle for gathering input from residents, businesses, and government agencies. Input received from the public regarding citizen participation revealed two important points. First, citizens want a meaningful voice in decision-making affecting land use and quality of life in the neighborhoods. Second, there has been a significant increase in the number of

active neighborhood associations in New Orleans post Hurricane Katrina where more than 200 groups are currently registered with City Planning. Some of these organizations are very effective at influencing decisions affecting their neighborhoods, while others require substantial support to address issues of interest.

With necessary funding allocated to this initiative within its 2011 Operating Budget, the City Planning Commission will begin work on developing a new neighborhood participation program. The staff will conduct activities and generate work products through a three-phase approach: 1) *Project Start-Up*: identify stakeholders, review previous plans and best practices, prepare summary document, 2) *Neighborhood Participation Plan Drafts*: develop two Drafts and a Final version of the Plan, and 3) *Adoption and Implementation*: prepare an ordinance for adoption as mandated by the Charter. Prepare policy memorandum for the Mayor's office recommending roles and responsibilities of departments and agencies in program implementation. City Planning will complete work outlined under this scope within six (6) months.

## PLAN DEVELOPMENT:

**PHASE I – Project Start Up:** January 18<sup>th</sup>, the City Planning Commission staff will commence work on the Neighborhood Participation Program by analyzing previous work and best practices, clarifying goals and objectives, verifying responsibilities, and developing a detailed work schedule. The CPC staff will also coordinate the NPP initiative with two other relevant projects: (1) the ongoing revision of the City's Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance with all its permanent public notice regulations;<sup>1</sup> and (2) the recent City Council Resolution R-11-135 which calls for cross-department coordination and implementation of temporary public notice requirements and administrative procedures for proposed land use and zoning actions and initiatives.

- 1. Identify Partners & Stakeholders:** The City Planning staff will coordinate the work of the NPP Task Force. The thirty-three (33) member NPP Task Force will consist of fourteen (14) members appointed by the City Council, with each councilperson appointing two (2) members; fifteen (15) members appointed by the Mayor's office; and four (4) members of the CPC's ~~Planning and Special Projects Committee~~. Two CPC members will serve as Task Force Co-Chairs. The Task Force will advise CPC staff during various steps of the NPP development process. The Task Force will start its work by reviewing all aspects of existing citizen participation within the City of New Orleans, including how information is disseminated to the public from various agencies and how the City receives and responds to community input. The more specific roles and responsibilities of the NPP Task Force can be described as follows:

Interlocal  
Committee  
+  
Zoning and Land Use

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<sup>1</sup> The CPC has already drafted new public notice requirements that include pre-application neighborhood meetings and an expanded area around the petitioned site to receive public notices.

Tasks	NPP Task Force	General Public
<b>Phase I.</b> Review of previous work, critical issues, and best practices. Review and comment on the Summary Document.	Yes (1 <sup>st</sup> Mtg)	---
<b>Phase II – A-</b> Review and comment on First Draft NPP documents	Yes (2 <sup>nd</sup> Mtg)	---
B- Review and comment on the Second Draft the NPP documents	Yes (3 <sup>rd</sup> Mtg or in writing)	Yes
<b>Phase III –</b> Review and comment on the Final Draft of the NPP (at the CPC and CC meetings)	---	Yes

Municipal participation will include city agencies currently engaged in land use planning, zoning actions, capital budget/projects programming, public outreach, and capacity building. These agencies include but are not limited to: the New Orleans City Council, the Mayor's Office of Community Development, the Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Engagement, the Department of Safety & Permits, the Capital Projects Administration, the Historic Districts Landmark Commission, the Vieux Carre Commission, the Department of Public Works, the Department of Parks and Parkways, etc.

2. **Review of Previous Work, Best Practices** (*Issue Identification & Analysis*): City Planning staff will review previous work completed on citizen participation in New Orleans and best practices nation-wide. Building on this work, the City Planning Commission's staff will prepare a written document that summarizes the importance of citizen participation and provides an overview of the various approaches to citizen participation in local decision-making. This information will be presented at the first Task Force meeting which should include the staffs of the relevant City agencies.
3. **Review Scope of Work:** The purpose of the Neighborhood Participation Program will be to fulfill the mandate of the City Charter, which calls for a system of organized and effective neighborhood participation in land use decisions and development matters that have a direct impact on the quality of life at the neighborhood level. The core issues the NPP will address are:
  - a. Amendments to the Master Plan
  - b. Zoning Changes, Conditional Uses, and Variances
  - c. Capital Budget Program
  - d. Ensuring all parts of the City have a solid organizational structure for public participation.
4. **Limitation:** It is the understanding of the CPC that the Neighborhood Participation Program will start with a system that will enable participation in land use and development matters as outlined above. The program should not require any public review of permitted uses, although there should be transparency in the permitting system. Similarly, while the Capital Improvement Program will be open for public

review, projects should require individual public review only when zoning changes or conditional uses are necessary. The NPP will have to rely on its allotted funding and work with the current administrative structure. Any future changes to the NPP may also require changes in funding and law.

As mentioned above, the NPP should be a collaborative effort with the new City Office of Neighborhood Engagement (ONE) which will serve as a “permanent mechanism for dialogue, information-sharing, partnership and action with neighborhood residents, leaders, and organizations” according to an administration news release. Based on initial discussions, the CPC staff believes that the NPP would focus on gathering public input on Master Plan, zoning, and the Capital Program, while ONE would focus on neighborhood/civic association capacity building, cross-department coordination of public processes, maintenance of a neighborhood/civic association database, centralizing and publishing public notices.

**PHASE II – Development of the Neighborhood Participation Program (NPP):** In this Phase, the City Planning Commission staff will prepare Draft versions of the document with the advice of the Task Force and general public.

1. **NPP Draft:** The City Planning will draft a plan that includes immediate as well as long term action items. The NPP will contain a Purpose Statement, Critical Elements, Core Goals, Recommendations, and Implementation sections. There seems to be broad consensus that the NPP should, at minimum, cover the following core goals and critical issues regarding the community involvement in land use and development matters as listed above under II.1 Scope of Work:
  - Early Notification and citizens input on proposed Master Plan amendments, Zoning Changes, Conditional Uses, and Variances
  - A Forum to Review and Comment on Master Plan amendments, Zoning Changes, and Conditional Uses
  - Review of the Capital Improvement Program
  - Training and Resources for Neighborhoods’ Capacity Building

To ensure that model is effective the plan will identify:

- Implementation techniques
  - Measures of Success
  - Funding Resources
  - Partners
  - Timelines
  - Organizational Structure and Responsible City Agencies
  - Evaluation, Amendments, Schedule
2. **Public Review:** With the assistance of the Task Force members, the CPC staff will prepare Draft #1, Draft #2, and the Final Draft of the NPP. Comments will be recorded at the general public meetings and taken into consideration by the City Planning

Commission. The public may also comment in writing to a designated e-mail address, through letters or by fax.

**PHASE III - Adoption & Implementation:** Once that public review of the Final Draft has been completed, the City Planning Commission will hold a public hearing(s) and forward its recommendations to the City Council for adoption.

#### **OUTREACH STRATEGIES:**

The City Planning Commission anticipates holding a series of Task Force and general public meetings. Over the course of the work, the Task Force and the public in general will receive reports on the draft Neighborhood Participation Program, review and comment on the proposal, and endorse final recommendations. Specific outreach activities will include:

1. Development of community-friendly fact sheets, newsletters and/or brochures informing the community of important program milestones and ongoing activities.
2. Two general public meetings: First will be a city-wide orientation meeting on citizen participation. This meeting - schedule allowing - will be attended by the Mayor and key government personnel. The session will present the merits of citizen participation and the importance of everyone working towards one comprehensive program. A second general public meeting will be held to review the NPP Draft document, Two public hearings will also precede formal adoption of the document, one by the City Planning Commission, the other by the City Council.
3. The NPP Task Force meetings in different stages of plan development.
4. Meetings with various constituent groups on an as-needed basis.

#### **PROJECT TEAM:**

The Comprehensive Planning Division of the City Planning Commission will be in charge of developing the program. The core team will consist of three planners with the assistance of other staff members on an as-needed basis. The Task Force meetings will be co-chaired by two City Planning Commissioners

#### **PROGRAM EVALUATION:**

The future review, evaluation and the amendment process will be done in two steps. First, at the annual Master Plan review date, immediate changes deemed necessary to the NPP can be considered. Second, at the comprehensive 5 year review for the Master Plan, a simultaneous comprehensive review of the NPP will be conducted to further refine the NPP as inevitable changes are necessary.