
ULI Charlotte, a District Council of the Urban Land Institute conducted a Technical Assistance Panel (“TAP”) on Community Engagement in the Development Process on June 2-3, 2021, to provide objective and responsible advice on the following questions:

1. How can the community be involved in development projects?
 - a. Need to establish clear goals and outcomes of what community engagement is intended to produce, such as affordable housing, public infrastructure and facilities, a thriving local economy, and a well-planned and equitable community.
 - b. Explore whether thresholds are needed for different levels of involvement.
2. What community benefits can come from development projects?
3. What tools can help communities organize and effectively participate?
4. What is the City’s role/responsibilities in participating and/or facilitating community involvement?

Unfortunately, the scope was too large to fully address in the format of a TAP and the scope would require an expansion to address all parties’ interests. As a result, the TAP recommends that the research and community conversations continue. In the meantime, a TAP report will be made available to the public and the City in late July. Acknowledging that the City Council is holding a meeting on June 7, the following key findings have been shared as a representation until the full report is available.

GENERAL TOPICS HEARD AFTER LISTENING TO 45 INDIVIDUALS REPRESENTING NEIGHBORHOODS, ELECTED OFFICIALS, CITY STAFF AND DEVELOPERS

1. All stakeholder groups believed community engagement can have a positive impact.
2. All stakeholders mentioned community benefits to date have not been equitable.
3. Both Community Representatives and Developers do not feel like their input is being fully gathered and acted upon.
4. Developers lacked understanding of how to best connect with the community.
5. Community and City Staff lacked understanding of the development process.
6. Everyone uses the word “benefit” in different ways.
7. Community engagement term is often used when people are actually talking about community equity.
8. There is a lot of mistrust in the conversation.
9. City staff did not have consensus on the intent of the Comp Plan’s community engagement language.
10. Housing & Neighborhood Services is a valuable department with opportunity to house some tools.
11. A lot of desire to continue the conversation right now and into the future. This is just the start.

INITIAL RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The conversation needs to be ongoing. Potential ideas to consider:
 - a. Facilitate virtual rooms at set times for developer, community members, city council, and city staff to join in. Have a note taker for each session.
 - b. Pair developer and community leader together to brainstorm ways to engage better.
 - c. Engage an additional ULI TAP for more interviews.

- d. Create a citizen-led group to work with the City and Developers to continually improve the engagement across the city.
2. There needs to be clear leadership for each community sector.
 - a. The City should serve as a network facilitator to connect the right people for full engagement.
 - b. Must be term limits to prevent any one individual's views dictating the community's interests.
3. Education on community engagement is paramount so that benefits can be better aligned with the engagement process for the greatest chance of success.
 - a. All stakeholders, including city staff and officials, community groups and developers have a role to play in this education process.
 - b. Emphasize need for public engagement to create long-range plans, small area plans, the UDO and rules of engagement so that benefits are clearly identified and baked into the development framework before any project gets underway.
 - c. Set reasonable expectations about the benefits that can be derived from any single development project.
 - d. A community education toolbox needs to be a priority.
 - i. Utilize existing resources and amplify them (Academy).
 - ii. Legal services.
 - iii. Information about how city and county function.
 - iv. Information about how development works.
4. Every City department should have a community engagement policy.
5. Support land banking concept for neighborhoods to plan for larger uses that are needed in the neighborhood.
6. Create three buckets of benefit types (site-specific, neighborhood-wide, city-wide). Address the tools, roles, and timing of each separately. The following questions will help to identify which bucket is best suited for the benefit:
 - a. Who does the benefit impact (both positively and negatively)?
 - b. Whose approval is required to make the benefit a reality?
 - c. Who enforces the benefit?
 - d. How long will it take to envision and agree on the benefit details?
 - e. How long does it take to implement the benefit?
 - f. How does the benefit get paid for?
 - g. How is the benefit maintained in the future?
7. Potential Tools for Site-Specific Benefits
 - a. Community-engagement workshop to finalize the following:
 - i. What site specific benefits are communities currently asking for?
 - ii. Are those benefits currently addressed in policies?
 - iii. How can those benefits not addressed be updated in policies?
 - iv. Educational resource added to community toolkit to help communities understand how their interests are protected in by-right development.
 - b. Rezoning Site Plan; as currently operating with potential tweaks:
 - i. Clear definition of Community needs to be given to a developer.
 - ii. City needs to notify adjacent neighbors of the potential rezoning at application and not just at community meeting. Utilize technology for more reach.
 - c. Community Benefits Agreement for projects utilizing public dollars (note the term Community Benefits Agreement has many meanings and will be defined in the July report).
 - d. Required neighborhood meeting for neighbors to learn what is coming in their neighborhood.

- i. As part of rezonings (as currently operating).
 - ii. For large-scale, by-right developments (need to define threshold for each zoning type). Must happen prior to land development permit application.
 - iii. While no benefit is required in the meeting, conversation can lead to potential win-wins.
 - iv. Record community meetings for community members who cannot attend meeting to watch or review at a later date.
- 8. Potential Tools for Neighborhood-wide Benefits
 - a. Small area plans to set a guide for future developments.
 - b. Community Investment Plans
 - i. Provide target infrastructure areas.
 - ii. Set up parameters for tax increment financing of infrastructure.
 - iii. Encourage development projects to contribute towards infrastructure through a higher match of tax increment financing to private dollars.
- 9. Potential Tools for City-wide Benefits
 - a. Create a central repository of community comments that can be analyzed so repetitive comments trigger action to study.
 - b. Tax freeze to reduce displacement occurring with gentrification.
 - c. Continue City committees to push for strategies addressing city goals (ex: affordable housing).
- 10. Centralized online tool for tracking and finding all physical change across the city – public infrastructure and public/private developments.