



Live, Work, Play

Public Participation Plan

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The State of Michigan legislation details the minimum requirements for public participation. The Village of Decatur abides by this legislation and strives to go above and beyond the traditional practices to be proactive in soliciting public input for all projects. Below are the laws regarding public input set by the state.

OPEN MEETINGS ACT (PA 267 OF 1976)

The Michigan Open Meetings Act was created to require certain meetings of certain public bodies to be open to the public, to require notice and the keeping of the minutes of the meetings.

The entirety of the act can be accessed through the state department or at the following website address: <http://www.legislature.mi.gov/documents/mcl/pdf/mcl-act-267-of-1976.pdf>

The following captures important highlights from the act.

In accordance with PA 267 of 1976, the Village of Decatur will hold meetings in the Village Hall building at 114 N. Phelps Street, which is accessible to the public.

The public will be notified within 10 days of the first meeting of a public body in each calendar or fiscal year; the body will publicly post a list stating the dates, times, and places of all its regular meetings at Village Hall.

If there is a change in schedule, within three days of the meeting in which the change is made, the public body will post a notice stating the new dates, times, and places of regular meetings.

For special and irregular meetings, public bodies will post a notice indicating the date, time, and place at least 18 hours before the meetings.

Note: A regular meeting of a public body which is recessed for more than 36 hours can only be reconvened if a notice is posted 18 hours in advance.

Public bodies will hold emergency sessions without written notice or time constraints if the public health, safety, or welfare is severely threatened and if two-thirds of the body's members vote to hold the emergency meeting.

Any citizen can request copies of the agenda, meeting packet, minutes, or any documents prior to the meeting. All meeting materials will be available online via the Village of Decatur website www.decatirmi.org. Any citizen needing special assistance obtaining information shall contact the Village Clerk prior to the start of the meeting.

PLANNING ENABLING ACT (PA 33 OF 2008)

The Michigan Planning Enabling Act was created to provide for county, city, and village planning and codify laws regarding it.

The entirety of the act can be accessed through the state department or at the following website address: [http://www.legislature.mi.gov/\(S\(xj3g1jal1er4tq45ve4x5vuz\)\)/documents/mcl/pdf/mcl-act-33-of-2008.pdf](http://www.legislature.mi.gov/(S(xj3g1jal1er4tq45ve4x5vuz))/documents/mcl/pdf/mcl-act-33-of-2008.pdf)

The following captures important highlights from this act.

In accordance with PA 33 of 2008, the following parties will be notified via first class mail, personal delivery, or electronic mail by the planning commission of the intent to plan and request the recipient's cooperation and comment:

- *Van Buren County*
- *Southwest Michigan Planning Commission*
- *Decatur Township*
- *Each public utility company, railroad company, and public transportation agency owning or operating a public utility, railroad, or public transportation system within The Village of Decatur, and any government entity that registers its name and mailing address for this purpose with the planning commission*
- *Van Buren County Road Commission and the Michigan Department of Transportation*

After the draft master plan has been submitted to the legislative body for review and approval for distribution, the draft plan will be submitted to the previously listed entities for review.

Before approving a proposed master plan, a planning commission will hold not less than one public hearing on the proposed master plan. The hearing will be held after the expiration of the deadline for comment as outlined in the act.

The planning commission will give notice of the time and place of the public hearing not less than 15 days before the hearing by publication in a newspaper of general circulation within The Village of Decatur.

The planning commission will also submit notice of the public hearing by first class mail, personal delivery, or electronic mail to the previously listed entities for review.

After the adoption of the master plan, a planning commission may publish and distribute copies of the master plan or of any report and employ other means of publicity and education.

KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Below is a list of groups that can assist in and enhance the public participation process, as well as identify groups that are often not at the visioning table. During each public event the list will be reviewed to make sure that the appropriate people and groups are involved. Since groups and businesses, and their associates, are constantly changing, this list only serves as a reference on which to build upon for each event.

- Community Residents
- Community's Large employers
- Commercial business owners
- Downtown Development Authority
- Neighboring municipalities
- Potential investors
- Public employees (village, library, police, fire, health, education)
- Real estate professionals
- Religious groups
- Senior groups
- Social organizations
- Students
- Young professionals
- Entrepreneurs

The Village of Decatur is blessed to be full of active residents that strive to make their community better. However, the Village is always trying to get more and more residents involved. The Village will use various methods of communication to attempt to reach a variety of audiences.

COMMUNICATION TOOLBOX

The Village staff are always looking for new ways to communicate with the public, researching and experiment with creative, new methods. The Village Manager oversees evaluating innovative opportunities, developing sustainable technological solutions, and promoting new media communication. Improving customer (resident) service performance is one of the Village's top priorities.

The Village updated their website in 2021 to streamline and enhance online communications. Multiple social media accounts have been created including Facebook and Nixle.

The Village's compact geography makes accessibility easier for residents. Using a variety of communication methods to get residents to meetings, committee meetings, or community events, such as utility bill inserts and texts, could increase representation from all residents.

BASIC ANNOUNCEMENT METHODS FOR PUBLIC MEETINGS MAY INCLUDE:

- Newspaper announcements
- Website postings
- Fliers
- Council meeting announcements
- Postcard mailings
- Attachments to water bills
- Village media accounts

Strong partnerships and stakeholder engagement make education and collaborative visioning possible. Committed to getting wide-ranging public input, the Village of Decatur uses creative and innovative strategies along with the more traditional methods. Below is a list and description of methods used in the past and are likely to be explored in the future.

SURVEYS

Surveys are useful for identifying specific areas of interest or concentration from a broad scope of ideas or issues. These areas of interest can then be further explored using other methods like the ones outlined below. A community may use a survey to identify where to start in the planning process, or the general climate surrounding a topic. Surveys can be useful to get a general idea of something but should not be used as the sole method of public input. It is helpful for a municipality to administer surveys with partners. For example, schools can send surveys home with children, churches can have them available to fill out and neighborhood groups can distribute them. As with most public input efforts, it is best to vary the delivery method (mailed, handed out, electronic) and include bilingual language where applicable.

Technology has increased delivery methods of surveys, including via social media and mobile phone texting.

Using a consultant to lead public involvement adds objective and professional supervision to help participants resolve disagreements and develop effective solutions.

WORKSHOPS

Workshops can be as simple as a series of question-and-answer sessions or as creative as creating a board game. Often, workshops are a great way to educate the community and hear concerns, questions, and ideas.

There are a variety of venues in The Village of Decatur that offer the needed space for workshops, depending on the scope of the project and expected attendance. The Village Hall, Library, School buildings, and meeting spaces in local businesses are often used for public meetings.

CHARRETTES

A charrette differs from a workshop because it is a multi-day event where designers and planners work on a plan in-between what are called “feedback loops.” Usually between three and seven days, citizens can come to the “charrette studio,” which is an office on or near the location of the proposed plan or project. Citizens offer ideas while the charrette team facilitates and observes. From these suggestions, the designers and planners change the plan to suit community input and present their creation the next day where the community offers feedback again. This makes up one cycle of a “feedback loop.” There can be up to five feedback loops, resulting in a final plan shortly thereafter. This process can be completed with many different budgets, depending on the expertise of municipal state and residents. Charrettes take much planning beforehand.

Depending on the plan or project, a charrette is an inclusive way to envision and create. The location and participants will be dependent on the scope of the project. Ideally, stakeholders to be affected by the project will convene for the charrette and it will be located near the project site.

FOCUS GROUPS

Focus groups can help to narrow down concepts or get a specific side of the story. During the last master plan input process, focus groups were identified by the Planning Commission and staff to prioritize issues and gather input on specific questions.

STANDING COMMITTEES

These are focus groups that repeatedly meet and will differ depending on the needs of a community. They are perfect for concerned residents, underrepresented groups, or groups that may have specific needs in a community, such as students or seniors. This is an opportunity for a municipality to draw from the expertise of residents, perhaps organizing a standing committee of real estate professionals, business owners and brokers to offer feedback.

SOCIAL NETWORKING

Technology offers a unique opportunity to give and receive information to a mass of people. Municipalities can post events, share information, and even solicit feedback. This public participation method is best used in conjunction with other methods because it excludes those who do not use social media. The ability to spread misinformation or post disrespectful comments easily makes it important to plan for the use of social media.

Social media has become an effective and efficient channel of communication between the community and their local government. The Village of Decatur’s social media efforts shall contribute toward the advancement of our presence as a digital village. Social media’s ability to drive community information, news, and opinion in real time helps the Village realize operating efficiencies, garner citizen engagement, and realize strategic objectives.

The Village has an overriding interest and expectation in deciding what is ‘announced’ or ‘spoken’ on behalf of the Village on social media sites. A written policy establishes internal procedures for the use of social media by Village of Decatur employees when posting for the Village of Decatur as well as personal use of social media when applicable. Social media sites include Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, and any other approved sites that are similar in content and/or character.

The Village Manager’s Office manages and approves all social media users. The Village’s Administrative Assistant is responsible for maintaining a social media presence to keep users engaged throughout the year. Department personnel may be approved to post project specific content. Target audiences may differ by social media site, for example business owners and professionals through LinkedIn or parents and creatives by Pinterest. Facebook and Twitter generally have a wider audience that spans age groups but is limited to those with the proper technology to access.

Social media can be used to update audiences on the progress of a project, distribute meeting notifications, solicit feedback from surveys or general comments, and generally engage and inform users.

WEBSITES

Websites offer an omnipresent, easily accessible method for distributing information, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Users know where to go to get the information or can search for content online. The Village of Decatur’s website offers an attractive and practical platform to access an abundant database of contact information, service offerings, project information, and much more. You can find our Village’s website at www.decatarmi.org.

PHONE/MOBILE

These days, most everyone has a mobile phone. Texting is a technology that most people have access to and know how to use. Texting potentially reaches the widest audience. Children and young adults with mobile devices are more likely to communicate via text than other traditional and social media methods. Senior and low-income populations are the most likely to not text, but more and more are gaining access every day. Texting technology is becoming more affordable and widespread. The village will explore the different options that are available.

OUTREACH STRATEGIES

There are many situations in which the Village will solicit public input for a plan or project. Public participation in the planning process not only satisfies political and public needs, it also increases the likelihood of plan success by making a more durable document. When residents are involved

in the plan process, they are more likely to stay involved afterwards by forwarding the vision and partaking in the action plan to better their community with a sense of ownership. Broad engagement in the planning process also helps to prevent delays caused by unforeseen issues. Engagement efforts will vary depending upon the type, intensity, and location of a project or plan.

MASTER PLAN UPDATE

The Master Plan is the visioning document for the Village which future developments and policy are created from. Therefore, it is the most important planning process to get the broadest engagement and most public input. A variety of communication tools should be used with an effort to gain attention and involvement from the widest sample of residents, representative of the entire village.

At least two workshops or visioning forums should be held. Notice will be given to all residents when the planning process begins and when a draft plan has been created. A public forum will be held to review the draft document. Various other input methods should be used as well, including, but not limited to, web surveys, interactive mapping projects, electronic updates, or focus groups.

ZONING ORDINANCE UPDATE

The Zoning Ordinance is the regulating document which helps forward the vision of the village as well as promote public health, safety, and general welfare. Since the document establishes comprehensive zoning regulations and provides for the administration, enforcement, and amendment of those regulations, it is important that the public are informed and can give input about updates. Zoning regulation is based off the master plan and therefore, doesn't need as extensive of an input process. However, informing and educating the public about updates or revisions of the ordinance is important. Traditional communications methods are most appropriate.

DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The Downtown Development Plan is the guiding document for the vision and success of the downtown. Downtown development planning is integral to the success of a village and its economic development. Public input and engagement in this process is important. Education on topics makes this process easier, as well as visioning techniques that can help the public understand various planning concepts.

Owners can be useful in bridging any misunderstandings. Public visioning sessions, websites, interactive mapping, and focus groups can all be useful in creating the downtown development plan.

PARKS AND RECREATION PLAN

Workshops, focus groups, surveys, websites, and/or alternative methods are useful in recreation planning. The Village of Decatur offered a community engagement survey that involved the parks and recreation committee in 2022.

LOW-CONTROVERSY DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Development plans require a review by Village staff. If the plan is low controversy, it may be approved administratively. If there are any questions, it may be forwarded to the Planning Commission for review and approval.

HIGH-CONTROVERSY DEVELOPMENT PLAN

A highly controversial development plan will most likely require one or more focus groups of relevant residents, business owners, and/or organizational leaders. Proactive notification and timely education can prevent some controversy. Mailings, media, websites, and other methods can keep residents informed to prevent misinformation and misunderstanding. Public hearings can allow developers, residents, and officials to work through development plans and solicit input.

COMMUNICATING RESULTS

Results from public participation sessions will be communicated back to the public by including it in the final plan document. Media can also be released immediately following a public input session to publish how many people attended and solicit further participation for future meetings. This demonstrates that the responses were heard, shows that public input is desired, and creates an environment of transparency.

Public Meetings: Meeting minutes are posted online.

Surveys: Surveys will be compiled by a consultant or village staff no later than three-four weeks after the survey is complete. Results will be posted online or in the appendix of the plan.

Community workshops/charrettes: Village staff oversee taking notes during workshops and charrettes. These notes will be shared at the end of the event as well as posted on a plan website if applicable. The notes will also be part of the plan appendix.

One-on-one interviews: Interview results will be kept confidential for the comfort of the participants unless otherwise requested.

Focus groups: Focus groups' results will be kept confidential for the comfort of the participants unless otherwise requested.

Standing committees: Meeting minutes will be taken by the appropriate secretary and made available to the public online.

Social networking: The Village Manager's Office is responsible for monitoring.

EVALUATION AND IMPROVEMENT

Continuous review of our public input processes is the only way that the Village of Decatur will remain a thriving and connected community. The residents are what make the Village of Decatur such a great community to live in. Their creativity and talent are irreplaceable in the planning processes of the community. Therefore, reflection on communication and involvement efforts is needed to verify that optimal methods are used. A Communication Event Satisfaction Survey will be used at each event (see appendix). Results can be analyzed by keeping records of participation, including the types of communication used, the quality and quantity of comments received, and the number of participants involved. The hired consultant or staff will oversee recording participation.

Each plan and project shall include a Public Participation Review. The Public Participation Review sample can be found in the appendix. Documentation will contribute to a public participation process that is continuously evolving to better obtain public input. To ensure that methods are effective, the P3 will be reviewed annually and updated when necessary.

Methods that have failed will not be removed from the P3 but will be reviewed and documented so that the same mistakes will not be made in the future.

CLOSING

Public participation, when properly executed, builds community consensus, and strengthens a sense of place. Creating a culture of collaborative visioning enriches democracy by allowing citizens to voice their ideas, not just their complaints. This plan is to be used and reviewed as a daily guide to best incorporate the public into decisions that affect their space.

APPENDIX
COMMUNITY EVENT SATISFACTION SURVEY

Community Event Satisfaction Survey
What event did you attend:
How did you hear about this event?
Was this event held at a convenient location and time? What time or location would have been more ideal?
Are you glad you came to this event? Would you improve it in any way?

INTERNAL PUBLIC PARTICIPATION EVALUATION

Internal Public Participation Evaluation
Type of public participation:
Date and Time:
How was the event advertised?
Where was the event held?
How many people attended? Was there a group under-represented? Over-represented?
Who facilitated the event?
What ways could the event have been improved?