



# City of Seattle

## Seattle Planning Commission

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To: Kathy Nyland, Director, Department of Neighborhoods  
From: Seattle Planning Commission  
Date: 11/28/2016  
Re: Implementation of Inclusive and Equitable Outreach and Engagement Practices

Director Nyland:

As stewards of the City's Comprehensive Plan, the Planning Commission consistently advocates for policies and programs that elevate race and social equity as a core value. Given the amount of growth and change Seattle is experiencing, it is especially critical to meaningfully engage communities and provide opportunities for all people in Seattle to guide investments throughout the City and in their neighborhoods. The Mayor's initiative to implement inclusive and equitable outreach and engagement practices and the Community Engagement element in Seattle's 2035 Comprehensive Plan will work to expand participation, build stronger relationships with and amongst Seattle's diverse communities, and result in a more equitable distribution of City resources. The Planning Commission supports the proposed legislation that implements the Mayor's initiative, including the establishment of a Community Involvement Commission and Community Involvement Principles.

The Planning Commission commends the Department of Neighborhoods (the Department) for their track record of innovative tools, commitment to broadening access points, and expanding the inclusion of under-represented communities in decision-making processes. We support the Department's leadership role in implementing a new citywide framework for public outreach and in developing community involvement plans with City departments in partnership with the Office for Civil Rights and the Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs. We expect that other City departments, including Seattle Parks and Recreation, Seattle Public Utilities, and Seattle Department of Transportation, will work collaboratively with the Department to improve relationships and authentic engagement with Seattle's communities. The Planning Commission encourages the Department to continue taking a proactive role in building community capacity and advancing Seattle's models for community engagement.

The Planning Commission recognizes the complexities and challenges in conducting outreach, and as legislation moves forward, recommends the following key elements be included in implementing a new system of community engagement:

- 1. New ideas and new leaders.** As the makeup of Seattle's population continues to change, it is critical to actively encourage newcomers and incumbents to participate, and to engage a diverse group of residents with varying backgrounds, ideas, and aspirations. Encourage community groups to consider term-limits for leadership roles to encourage new perspectives that contribute to a rich and meaningful conversation.
- 2. Information on City processes.** Planning processes often have long timelines and deal with complex issues, which can cause confusion and frustration among communities. Ensure that information regarding the purpose and scope of meetings and outreach efforts is succinct and meaningful. Clearly articulate when and how participants can offer feedback, and provide a venue or outlet for tangential comments and concerns. When participants understand the intent of particular outreach events, as well as how these events fit within the larger scope of a project, it may help to preclude negative discourse about City process and encourage an open and inviting conversation focused on discovering solutions for the issues at hand.
- 3. Communication that informs and empowers.** Develop documents and communication that emphasizes educational information, especially for complex policy issues, and can be easily understood by people who are unfamiliar with City policies, processes, and terminology. Use a mix of verbal, written, and graphic communication to universally present ideas and information. In addition to being easily accessible, information should be actively distributed to communities.
- 4. Relevant and meaningful participation.** Continue to develop culturally-sensitive processes and strategies that encourage participation. Outreach and engagement strategies should advance racial and social equity by identifying opportunities for communities to flourish, in addition to challenges and needs, and providing resources to aid community-lead initiatives. Continue to improve access to participation for all stakeholders by meeting communities at their events, providing alternatives to public meetings, and building on successes such as the City Scoop events. Provide opportunities for communities to cross pollinate and educate each other. Use a racial and social equity lens when making decisions about the use of online tools, and be critical about the role, design, and content of surveys, forms, and comment sharing.
- 5. All generations of Seattleites.** As planning efforts can take decades to take effect, it is critical to engage a diversity of ages in decision-making. Youth can be instrumental in communicating information to non-English speaking families and neighbors. Build on recent actions such as the Youth Voice, Youth Choice Participatory Budgeting program, and adding youth to the Public Outreach and Engagements Liaison Program. Work with youth to develop relevant opportunities for younger stakeholders to learn about components of healthy, livable environments, and to further empower their voices in shaping the future of their communities. In discussions with adults, emphasize the importance of planning for future generations.

6. **Tracking outcomes.** As Seattle continues to evolve, ensure that outreach strategies respond to the growing and changing population. Establish metrics and methods to track outcomes of community involvement strategies, focusing on meaningful and relevant engagement of all demographics. Set goals for the frequency of periodic updates to community involvement plans so that they continue to be relevant to our evolving and emerging communities. Develop standards for City departments to share results of stakeholders' input and clearly identify where community feedback has been incorporated.

7. **Synchronized Outreach and Engagement.** Often a variety of projects, headed by various City departments, take place within a community. Overlapping project timelines can make it confusing to residents on how to engage in decision-making processes, resulting in lost opportunities for the sharing of information that could benefit the success of each project. It is critical that City departments follow DON's leadership as they work to integrate engagement efforts across departments, which can reduce participation fatigue in communities and lead to more comprehensive and responsive strategies and policies.

The Planning Commission looks forward to further briefings and opportunities for involvement as the Department of Neighborhoods leads the City's efforts to improve public engagement and outreach across the City. We hope to see bold, innovative advances that position the city at the forefront of inclusive participation. Please contact me or our Interim Executive Director, Valerie Kinast, at (206) 233-7911, if you have any questions or would like to discuss our interest in DON's work.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Grace H. Kim". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Grace Kim, Chair  
Seattle Planning Commission