


October 3, 2023

**FOR YOUR INFORMATION**

TO: Mayor and Members of Council

FROM: Sheryl M.M. Long, City Manager 

SUBJECT: Update on Project Engage – the City Manager’s Draft Community Engagement Plan and Policy

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I am pleased to share with you a draft of the City’s Community Engagement Plan and Policy, as prepared on my behalf by the staff of the Department of City Planning and Engagement.

**BACKGROUND**

On September 1, 2021, City Council approved Ordinance 0358-2021 requesting the City Manager, with input and participation from citizens, community councils, community groups, and City partners, develop an additional community engagement plan. The Ordinance was formed to improve and increase City-led community engagement according to the policy goals outlined: 1) providing efficient and effective services, 2) increasing transparency and effectiveness, 3) acknowledging that those affected by local government decisions should have the opportunity to participate in an engagement process, 4) allowing for greater transparency and citizen participation, 5) adhering to the previously established community engagement policy, and 6) presenting an additional community engagement plan. The Ordinance requested that the City Manager convene an initial public engagement session no later than 60 days after the effective date of the ordinance.

**CREATION OF THE DRAFT COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PLAN AND POLICY**

*Community Conversations*

The City Manager asked the Department of City Planning and Engagement to facilitate the initial community engagement sessions to collect public input and prepare a report of the findings. In October 2021, the Department sent out a survey and held three Citywide input meetings. Staff launched the Community Conversations project on the City website including meeting dates, a link to the survey, and other feedback opportunities. Members of the public were invited to all public input meetings.

The following meetings were held: an in-person meeting on November 9, 2021, at Bond Hill Recreation Center; an in-person meeting on November 17, 2021, at Westwood Town Hall; and a virtual meeting on November 22, 2021 via Zoom. All meetings were held in the evening. The meetings were focused on collecting information about ideal community engagement practices based on five question prompts. Staff led the participants in small group discussion. Additionally, a community engagement survey was conducted on SurveyMonkey, and was open to the public from October 15, 2021 to December 1, 2021, to collect feedback about current City communication and engagement tools.

The participants of the survey and meetings represented a variety of stakeholders and constituent groups. Survey respondents represented thirty-three (33) City neighborhoods. One hundred and fifty-nine (159) survey responses were submitted. Twenty-three (23) participants attended the meeting in Bond Hill. Twenty-one (21) participants attended the meeting in Westwood. Forty-one (41) participants attended the virtual meeting. A total of eight-five (85) individuals participated in the meetings. The report and a description of the full process are available on the Department of City Planning and Engagement website here: [www.cincinnati-oh.gov/community-conversations](http://www.cincinnati-oh.gov/community-conversations). The Department of City Planning and Engagement also provided a presentation on the findings of the Community Conversations at the 2022 Neighborhood Summit and at a meeting of the Healthy Neighborhoods Committee on June 1, 2022.

#### *Development of City's Community Engagement and Communications Team*

To ensure success of the future Community Engagement Plan and Policy, it was important to also expand the capacity of the City's Community Engagement and Communications staff. In 2022, the City Manager's Office re-established the Office of Communications and throughout the year hired three staff members, including a Director of Communications. In the FY2023 City of Cincinnati Budget, two Community Engagement Specialist positions were allocated to the Department of City Planning and Engagement to develop and implement the Community Engagement Policy. Those positions were filled in January and August of 2023.

In Spring 2023, the internal Strategic Initiative Execution Tool (SIET) Community Engagement and Communications Working Group was formed to include a staff-level representative from nearly all City departments with a goal of guiding development of the Community Engagement Plan and Policy and securing support from City Staff.

#### *Engagement with City Staff*

In order to create a long term and sustainable culture of engagement, it was critical to also engage City employees in the development of the draft Community Engagement Plan and Policy. In the summer of 2022, the Department of City Planning and Engagement conducted outreach with each department Director to seek input about how each department currently engages the community and identify potential areas of improvement. In Spring 2023, a survey about community engagement was sent to all City Employees. Over 700 employees responded to the survey. The results of engagement at both leadership and all-staff level was a resounding agreement that community engagement is important but that there is a need for more training, support, and resources to ensure success.

#### *The Draft Plan and Policy*

Attachment A of Ordinance 0358-2021 was used as an initial guide for the Plan and Policy, but the draft evolved to include the input from the in-person and virtual Community Conversations held in November 2021, the one-on-one interviews with Department Directors in 2022, and the Employee Survey in 2023. The Community Engagement and Communications SIET Working Group played a significant role in completing the draft. The overall work was led by the Department of City Planning and Engagement's two Community Engagement Specialists with great assistance from the Office of Communications.

### **ENGAGEMENT ON THE DRAFT PLAN AND POLICY**

The Department of City Planning and Engagement will be offering numerous opportunities for all members of the Cincinnati community to provide input on the Draft Community Engagement Plan and Policy:

- The Draft Plan and Policy is attached and is on the City's website at: <https://www.cincinnati-oh.gov/engage/>
- Several in-person meetings are scheduled to allow community members to give direct input on the plan and policy and participate in an exercise to assist in development of the definitions. Those meetings are currently scheduled for **Tuesday, October 17, 2023 at Pleasant Ridge Recreation Center; Tuesday, October 24 at Hirsch Recreation Center in Avondale; and Thursday, November 2nd, 2023 at McKie Recreation Center in Northside**. All meetings will begin at 6:00 p.m. Community members can register for one of the in-person meetings at: <https://forms.office.com/r/PcusnZQG8Y>
- The Community Engagement and Communications SIET Team will hold weekly pop-up events at various locations throughout the City to gather additional insight on the draft.
- For those unable to attend an in-person meeting, there is a survey available through the month of October. The Survey can be found here: <https://forms.office.com/r/qGiXyUB5FQ>
- Additional engagement of City staff will be conducted.

## **TRAINING AND RESOURCE GUIDE FOR STAFF**

In addition to the attached Plan and Policy, there will be a Training Program and Resource Guide developed for City Staff. When the Plan and Policy go into effect, all City Staff will begin to participate in a comprehensive training program. The Department of City Planning and Engagement is working with the Department of Human Resources to develop and instruct the classes. In addition to training, all City Staff will have access to a Resource Guide, which will provide direction, support, ideas, and templates on engagement expectations according to the Plan and Policy. The Resource Guide is currently still under development and is expected to be a living document that will be updated continually to reflect successful examples of community engagement in real time.

## **NEXT STEPS**

After public comment on the Draft Plan and Policy is finished and any appropriate edits are complete, the Final Plan and Policy will be released with an aim to go into effect January 1, 2024. There are no additional financial resources proposed for implementation at this time, but any additional resources required will be requested beginning in the FY 2025 budget.

The Department of City Planning and Engagement is currently working with the Office of Performance and Data Analytics to develop a method of tracking community engagement activities and setting measurements for success. The tracking and measurement of the Plan and Policy will direct any future updates to both the Plan and Policy and the Resource Guide.

The objective of this process has been to develop a Community Engagement Plan and Policy that not only meets the policy goals outlined in Ordinance 0358-2021 but is a national model for engagement.

cc: William "Billy" Weber, Assistant City Manager  
Katherine Keough-Jurs, FAICP, Director, Department of City Planning and Engagement

Attachments