

Baltimore 2030//Comprehensive Plan Engagement Strategy & Goals

At the Department of Planning, we want the Comprehensive Plan to reflect voices representative of Baltimore. This document will outline an approach to reaching this overarching goal.

The purpose of this strategy is to outline the goals, methods, and a timeline to engage the public in shaping the Comprehensive Plan. In addition, this document also defines principles that will guide the overall strategy.

Defining Engagement

The Department of Planning is prioritizing a people-driven plan – we want broad resident and community input. This means we want to reach as many people as we can to ensure that they are aware of the process, and are able to participate in whatever way works best for them.

At the same time, we also value deep resident and community engagement. This means having more conversations with residents to understand their experiences and offering more opportunities for residents to participate in shaping the content of the plan.

Through this process, we want to shift the usual power dynamic of planning.

Defining Equity

The Department of Planning, since 2015, has worked to integrate an equity lens to our work. The Department developed an internal definition for equity:

An equitable Baltimore addresses the needs and aspirations of its diverse population and meaningfully engages residents through inclusive and collaborative processes to expand access to power and resources.

Goals for Engagement Strategy

This connects to proposed metrics (see Appendix A)

1. **Listen to Baltimore.** We want to listen to voices representative of Baltimore, especially those that have been systematically left out of the planning process in the past.
2. **Build and repair civic trust.** The Comprehensive Plan engagement process is an opportunity to develop Department-wide standards for community engagement moving ahead, prioritizing building civic trust.
3. **Equity.** We aim to apply our Departmental four-part equity lens to this process and to the policies that result from it. (See <https://planning.baltimorecity.gov/equity> for more on the lens).

Guiding Principles

In writing this proposal, we sought out the guidance of Baltimore City residents that have participated in several public planning initiatives in recent years and are familiar with what worked and didn't work during those processes.

Based on what we heard from this group, we developed the following guiding principles for our engagement work. *(see Appendix B for more information on the process of developing these principles).*

1. **Neighborhoods, not Downtown.** During the engagement process, we must “meet people where they are” in neighborhoods, not downtown. We must offer many different avenues to learn about the Comprehensive Plan and offer input. Public engagement should be both accessible – we must meet people where they are – and meaningful – we must ensure that the input received informs the policies and plans in the final document.
2. **Let Neighborhood Leaders Lead.** We hear, “it's not how you reach out, it is who reaches out”. We envision a process where residents and organizations will play the lead role in determining what meaningful engagement looks like in their community. This means we must also prioritize compensating residents and organizations for taking the lead on designing engagement events and opportunities.
3. **Prioritize Trust Building and Repair.** Distrust of government was the most commonly cited barrier to civic engagement per the survey and conversations conducted during the pre-planning stage *(see Appendix)*. The Advisory Council and DOP team need to explore what trust building and repair looks like in the context of the Comprehensive Plan engagement process. As a starting point, the engagement process

must openly grapple with the history of planning policies that contributed to inequitable outcomes in Baltimore.

4. **Prioritize organizations that lead on culture and amplify Black voices.** We want to provide different avenues of interacting with the Department of Planning and the Comprehensive Plan process – not just traditional meetings. The planning and engagement process must be relevant to Baltimore and reflect Baltimore’s culture and people. Creative engagement approaches (if done right) can result in a process that is more culturally responsive to the community. In Baltimore, this means amplifying Black organizations specifically.
5. **Equitable:** The Comprehensive Plan engagement strategy must intentionally tackle the procedural equity component of our four-part equity lens. This means we must prioritize residents that have been historically excluded from planning and government decision making processes – especially those in the “black butterfly” (as defined in the book “*A Black Butterfly*” by public health scholar Dr. Lawrence Brown).

Proposed Strategy: In-Person Engagement

Three components are discussed below.

All of these roles must be compensated based on the time commitment involved.

In addition, a series of relevant short case studies are available in the Appendix.

1. Community Engagement Leadership Team

The first component of our engagement strategy will convene a community engagement leadership team composed of organizations that will guide and design engagement events for their community.

We recognize that a one-size-fits-all approach to engagement doesn’t work, so we are proposing a decentralized process led by a team of community groups. Each community group will determine what form of engagement works best for their community, and together, the team will determine the framework for engagement activities (the shared goals).

In order to convene this team, the Department of Planning must conduct broad outreach, focusing on reaching potential partners representative of Baltimore and particularly communities identified in the pre-planning process as high priority for engagement (*see Appendix B*).

The Department of Planning will work collaboratively with the Comprehensive Plan Advisory Council to design the outreach strategy, the proposal application, and the proposal review process. Access and equity will be critical factors during this process.

The Department of Planning will provide funding and support to each member of the engagement advisory team for engagement events, as requested per proposals submitted.

Engagement team role:

- This team will be composed of *community based organizations* taking the lead on designing what engagement looks like for their particular community; a designated representative of each organization will serve on the Engagement Advisory team.
- Collectively, the Engagement Advisory team will determine the goals and parameters for engagement.
 - Individually, each Engagement Advisory organizational team member will host engagement events that fit the needs of their community.

2. Ambassador Storytelling

The Department of Planning will partner with a Baltimore based storyteller expert (one or more). This storyteller will train a network of Community Ambassadors to record neighborhood stories. We envision that the storyteller/trainer will have deep familiarity with Baltimore, and might also be grounded in the West African Griot tradition.

The purpose of this strategy is to provide an alternative avenue to engage community members outside of traditional meeting structures. This strategy is modeled on the Sustainability Plan's approach to support broader outreach. While the Ambassadors themselves might be seasoned civic leaders, our vision is that they will reach friends, family and neighbors that do not typically engage with the Department of Planning.

The initial phases of engagement will focus on honoring the history of Baltimore's neighborhoods. Later phases will highlight current experiences of residents day today as well as future ideas to address major plan themes.

The conversations will seek out stories to honor community history, celebrate the local culture, and build community. This will culminate in a community-wide public art event to celebrate the rich history of Baltimore.

Ultimately, there must be a clear pathway from the stories gathered to the content of the plan. This is something that the Department of Planning must work carefully with both the Engagement Advisory team and the Ambassadors on – to design a process that honors this goal.

Community Ambassador role:

- Each Ambassador will participate in a two-hour storytelling training, led by a community leader skilled in public engagement through storytelling.
- Each Ambassador will engage their community in storytelling as a means to build a shared understanding of what shapes Baltimore’s neighborhoods.
- The Ambassadors will build a bridge between City government and the broader community by engaging their family, friends and neighbors, particularly those who might not typically interact with local government.
 - We envision that the Engagement Advisory team (see above) might take a lead role in designing an outreach process for recruiting a team of Ambassadors representative to Baltimore.

3. Community Design Fellows

The Department of Planning will recruit Community Design Fellows. Each Fellow will work both with the Planning Department and community based organizations to support engagement opportunities and shape the plan.

Design Fellows role:

- Participate in the Planning Academy for a foundational understanding of zoning, land use and development in Baltimore.
- Work with neighborhood-based Community Engagement Advisor organizations to support engagement events.
- Work with Department of Planning staff to synthesize ideas gathered through engagement directly into content of Comprehensive Plan.

Fellows may be of all ages, but Baltimore residents with an interest in urban planning as a career pathway will be prioritized. This aligns with our Equity Action Plan goal of developing a professional pipeline for future Planner positions within the Department.

Proposed Digital Engagement

The engagement strategy above focuses on in-person engagement opportunities. Digital and traditional communication outreach strategies will also be an important complement to in-person opportunities.

- **Digital website.** We plan to launch a website dedicated to the Comprehensive Plan alongside with a public launch. This website will keep the public updated on the goals, timeline, process, team and public engagement/input opportunities. We will also use new tools (Bang the Table, Konveio) available to us to offer opportunities for residents to weigh in digitally, vote and select ideas.
- **Social media.** We plan to work to develop social media graphics and a robust calendar to share information about the Comprehensive Plan and why it matters, while also providing a digital opportunity for public input for those that prefer to engage via these channels.
- **Video and Art.** We propose working with local partners to generate a video or portrait series to inform the public about the Comprehensive Plan process. This series will be embedded on our website and shared via social media, providing an alternative and more interactive option for residents to learn about the Comprehensive Plan process.
- **SMS/Texting.** We plan to explore using SMS/Texting technology to spread the word about easy ways to respond and provide input on the draft Comprehensive Plan strategy.
- **Digital Survey.** We will use existing (SurveyMonkey) and new technology to solicit input on draft components of the Comprehensive Plan via survey, particularly one that is mobile/text friendly, easy and quick.
- **Digital Storymap.** We will develop resources to share the story of Baltimore's past and future land use via interactive storymapping tools using ArcGISHub and related tools. One specific project could include translating the internal "racism in the structure" presentation into a publicly accessible and available storymap.
- **Traditional media.** Finally, we will still engage our traditional media partners, including print media and radio, in order to raise awareness around the Comprehensive Plan and make sure that residents know that their input is valued and needed.

Additional Considerations

- This strategy leans away from traditional public meetings, in favor of a more decentralized effort where Department of Planning plays a support role rather than act as a nexus of all engagement events. However, we do still anticipate hosting several public events (eg: a

Town Hall). We will collaboratively work with the Advisory Council and the Engagement team to determine the timing and goals for this.

- In addition to the Advisory Council and the Engagement Team, the Department of Planning anticipates organizing content-based committees or workgroups to work collaboratively to translate input into content and policy. We anticipate the focus of these groups to emerge in response to the themes and topics identified during early engagement.

Timeline (proposed; subject to change)

Stage 1: Pre-Planning (tentative: June 2021-December 2021)

- Survey and conversations with alums of Planning engagement efforts (Planning Academy, Sustainability Ambassadors, Food Policy Advisors)
- Launch Advisory Council and public website
- Develop and seek feedback on engagement strategy, refine as needed

Stage 2: Team Building (tentative: January 2022-April 2022)

- Outreach to form Engagement Advisory team, collaboratively designed with Advisory Council
- Begin outreach to recruit and hire Community Design Fellows

Stage 3: Design (tentative: May 2022-June 2022)

- Begin Ambassador recruitment, working with Engagement Advisory team to design outreach process.
- Collaboratively design (with Engagement Advisors team as lead) framework for engagement events (eg: what are the shared goals? What are the key questions for the public to offer input on? What themes will tie engagement together?).
- Representative survey launches digitally, available for mobile access. Survey will focus on high level themes and questions
- Design Fellows participate in Planning Academy

Stage 4: Collaborate (tentative begins July 2022-2023)

- Storytelling Ambassador training, engagement occurs
- Design Fellows work embedded with Engagement team organizations, design and implement engagement opportunities
- Digital engagement: public can provide input and ideas
- Sub-committees & focus groups: TBD

Stage 5: Synthesize (tentative begins October 2022-2023)

- Design Fellows will work with Planning to synthesize findings from engagement events into content.
- Planning will synthesize findings from digital engagement.
- Planning Academy: This cohort of Planning Academy will be able to shape the content of the plan, akin to Food Equity Advisors process.
- Planning staff, alongside consultants, will begin to compile written draft.
- Sub-committees & Focus Groups: TBD

Stage 6 onwards: (2023)

- Written draft released for public comment via Konveio.