

December 1, 2009

Criteria for Neighborhood Plan Validation

Based on the work of the NPAC Validation Subcommittee, and the December 1996 Neighborhood Planning Office "Guidelines for Validation," the following is NPAC's proposed outline of criteria for neighborhood plan validation. These criteria are applicable to both plan updates and wholly new plans. The 1996 document contains guidance that is still valid, and should be referenced during the planning process.

In this outline of criteria for neighborhood planning validation, "Planning Committee" is the name for the entity empowered to develop a particular neighborhood plan or update, and "City" is the department(s) authorized to oversee the process and take the product to the City Council for review and approval (e.g., incorporation into the City's Comprehensive Plan).

Neighborhood Planning Validation Criteria and Steps

1. The estimated cost of conducting an open and accessible planning process-including provisions for outreach and validation-must be determined before commencing, and adequate funding must be available before the City helps a community set up a Planning Committee.
2. All validation related activities must be documented in the City's comprehensive plan files, and maintained along with all related materials in an accessible archive for easy reference, preferably on line.
3. The planning process (new or update) must be inclusive of all interested stakeholders (people who live, work, own property, or do business in the planning area, or their organizational representatives). Documentation of outreach to stakeholders and their inclusion in the Planning Committee must be maintained. Membership on the Planning Committee should reflect the demographics of the affected area.
4. One early Planning Committee activity is the development of the scope of the plan or update. The vision, goals, issues, objectives, and the like should be presented for review and comment by the community prior to commencing the substantive planning process. [In the mid-1990s process, development of the vision and goals was called "Phase I", and the development of the plan proper with the help of consultants was called "Phase II."]
5. Another of the Planning Committee's first activities will be the development of a detailed outreach plan and budget based on the agreed scope of the planning effort. The City may, in conjunction with the NPAC or similar neighborhood oriented body, develop numeric or other specific guidelines. The planning process cannot proceed until an outreach plan is approved by the committee and the City, and both assure that adequate funding is available for implementation (e.g., sufficient funds for the number of mailings called for in the outreach plan, and for all needed consultants, copies, meetings, and other activities needed to address the agreed upon scope of the planning process).
6. Any consultants retained to help with the planning process should be under the direct control of the Planning Committee, with the advice and consent of the City. The scope of work for any consultant(s) retained to help with the process must be consistent with the planning process scope agreed upon by the committee. The process of searching for and selecting consultants must be spelled out by the committee and distributed to the community.

7. The Planning Committee's process should allow for the presentation of minority recommendations in the committee's final proposals where there is substantial lack of consensus.

8. The validation process for the Planning Committee's final recommendations must include sufficient community wide outreach to ensure a high degree of penetration. Methods include all address mailings and multiple community wide and stakeholder group meetings. The 1996 Guidelines suggested a minimum of two public forums to present the committee's recommendations and ensure community support for them.

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