

This meeting summary was produced by City Bureau Documenters, in accordance with our editorial independence policy, with financial support from the city of Chicago. If you believe anything in these notes is inaccurate, please email City Bureau at documenters@citybureau.org with "Correction Request" in the subject line.

Advisory Committee Meeting #7

February 15, 2022, 9:00AM | 2 hours

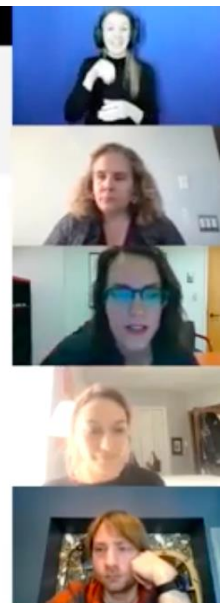
Documented by: Maggie Macpherson

ATTENDEES

- Ally Brisbin
- Courtney Kashima
- Katrina Balog
- Kathleen Dickhut
- Skyler Larrimore
- Juan Sebastian Arias
- Katya Nuques
- Lauren Burdette
- Gabriela Jirasek
- Roberto Requejo
- Todd Vanadilok
- Bridget Hayman
- Charsetta Reed
- Christina Harris
- Christopher Chwedyk
- Cliff Helm
- Ellen Shepard
- Fran Rood
- Mary Kenney
- Maureen Burns
- May Toy
- Michelle Roseborough
- Rosa Ortiz
- Todd Wyatt
- Risa Rifkind
- Deepa Gupta
- Isobel Araujo

 **REPORT OUT**

1. Share a reflection on the process
2. Share 2-3 objectives from your group



MEETING GOAL

Develop objectives to increase transparency and public involvement in the planning process, to inform the creation of We Will's community engagement policies.

WHERE WE ARE



Step 1

We Are

Setting the Stage



Step 2

We Have and Need

Develop A Policy Toolkit



Step 3

We Will

Set Policy Framework

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 1 | Transparency in government operations and decision-making can only be achieved if we invest in it. The abstract value of transparency is not enough.
- 2 | It is essential to keep in mind what and who transparency and community involvement in decision-making are ultimately for. If information or opportunities for community engagement are made more available but residents don't know about them, or aren't able to access them, the city has failed.
- 3 | This month's meeting was about outlining objectives for community engagement; March will be about defining specific policies the Department of Planning and Development can enact as they move into the public engagement phase of the We Will Plan in July.

CONVERSATION HIGHLIGHTS

“We can’t rely on a nonprofit infrastructure or a think tank infrastructure if we think transparency is a core government responsibility.”

Lauren Burdette | City of Chicago, Deputy Director of Equity and Policy

“Most people value their time, and if they feel like the process does not allow them to give input, they check out very quickly...I think there’s a difference between transparency and empowering people to contribute to the decision-making process.”

May Toy | Skinner Park Advisory Council, President

“The thing that’s going to make the difference on engagement is people taking what they know and being like, ‘what can I do with this information?’”

Deepa Gupta | Blue Lotus Advisors, Founder and Principal

“I just wanted to bring transparency to the lens of accessibility. Sometimes organizations will feel like they’re being transparent, but the information that they’re providing is only in one language.”

Maureen Burns | Community Health Worker

“[Community involvement] in the service of what? In service of empowering residents who are most impacted by a decision to impact that decision.”

Skyler Larrimore | City of Chicago Mayor’s Office, First Deputy Director of Policy

NOTES

Overview and Agenda

- The goal for today is to develop objectives for community engagement as We Will moves into its second stage and looks towards engaging the public beginning in July of this year, after the pillar committees release their policy recommendations.
- Kathleen Dickhut (Deputy Commissioner, Chicago Department of Planning and Development) will give a brief overview to the Plan Commission this Thursday, February 17, on We Will's progress up to this point.
- Juan Sebastian Arias (City of Chicago) gave an overview of the community engagement reference materials sent out to Committee Members prior to the meeting (linked below).
- Skyler Larrimore (City of Chicago) then touched on the engagement plans Minneapolis, Edmonton, and New York City implemented in their own planning processes. She emphasized that the focus of today's Committee meeting would be on developing objectives for engaging community members, from which they will think about specific policies at next month's meeting. "Policies are specific recommendations that will consider trade-offs, different approaches, but the larger objectives are the same for all of them."
 - Rafael Leon (Chicago Metropolitan Housing Development Corporation) asked if they should focus on how to engage the private sector because he's concerned that if the plan only engages the public, the We Will Chicago report "will be shelved."
 - Larrimore responded that there is not a heavy focus on engaging industry groups in the plan thus far, but "this plan is not a traditional economic development plan."
 - Gabriela Jirasek (DPD) added that, "What we're trying to do with this group today is [ask], 'how do we standardize [engagement] across all city agencies, across city departments, so that we don't see people in Housing getting more involved [in giving input into the We Will plan] than people in Transportation?'"

Discussion

- Courtney Kashima (Muse Community + Design) introduced the guiding questions for the meeting's discussion:
 - How can we increase transparency in decision-making processes?
 - How can we increase community involvement in decision-making processes?
- I remained in the main Zoom room with the group discussing the first question on transparency. Kashima gave the group ten minutes to individually review the question and begin to draft objectives on the shared Google Doc, before everyone started to share.
 - Michelle Roseborough (Rotary International) initiated the conversation. "I know in certain circles we use the word transparency a lot, and there seems to be an assumption that we know what that means." She thinks that what transparency is, and why it's important, may not be immediately obvious to the general public, so any effort to increase transparency has to make its purpose clear.
 - Rafael Leon added, "I think that it's important to define what a process is for any given project or program," so community members who engage at any point know what stage came before and will come after they intersect with a process.

- Libia Bianibi (Arts Alliance Illinois) emphasized that “the city tries to be transparent reactively when something comes up, but instead we should be proactively transparent...The way to be more transparent is to enact a culture of sharing information when it comes to meetings.”
- The conversation continued with Committee members contributing their perspectives on sharing information. Some additional responses:
 - “I just wanted to bring transparency to the lens of accessibility. Sometimes organizations will feel like they’re being transparent, but the information that they’re providing is only in one language,” said Maureen.
 - “What are the decisions that are in the scope that we’re trying to be transparent about?...once we define the scope, I think it’s really about giving the information out...We need to look at how information is disseminated...and I think that the private sector really has a role to play there in terms of the city,” said Mary Kenney (BMO Financial Group)
- One important distinction participants made was between making information more available, and making it useful:
 - “Most people value their time, and if they feel like the process does not allow them to give input, they check out very quickly...I think there’s a difference between transparency and empowering people to contribute to the decision-making process,” said May Toy (Skinner Park Advisory Council).
 - “Because technology allows us to choose (a) how (b) from whom; and (c) and where we receive information, I suggest it is really important that we take time to understand those channels and activate those with dedicated network of people to support information dissemination and consumption. Who individuals will trust to do something with that information after they have understanding, is the second step. Without people to activate that information (follow up, create space for people to ask questions, ensure understanding, etc.), the digital tools may only get us so far.” - Deepa Gupta (Blue Lotus Advisors), via the chat
- Finally, discussion turned to broader structural improvements that the city could make to improve transparency beyond the We Will initiative.
 - “We can’t rely on a nonprofit infrastructure or a think tank infrastructure if we think transparency is a core government responsibility,” said Lauren Burdette (City of Chicago).
 - “I also think we need more youth engagement, many people are cynical about engaging in city government, they think it is pointless. Perhaps if we started younger even with people who can’t yet vote, we might get greater levels of engagement throughout a person’s lifespan,” Maureen added via the chat.
- The group discussing the second question on community involvement rejoined the main room, and each group shared some key points from their conversations.
 - “Generally, the idea of smaller government has perhaps limited our ability to invest in people to do this work in a dedicated manner,” said Deepa Gupta on transparency.
 - Skyler Larrimore added that her group discussed how they should constantly be questioning who community involvement in decision-making is ultimately for and should ultimately benefit. “[Community involvement] in the service of what? In service of empowering residents who are most impacted by a decision to impact that decision.”
- The meeting ended with an overview of next steps, listed below.

RESOURCES

METROPOLITAN PLANNING COUNCIL'S PRE-PLANNING REPORT

https://www.metroplanning.org/uploads/cms/documents/peer_workshops_executivesummary_new.pdf

ELEVATED CHICAGO'S COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PRINCIPLES & RECOMMENDATIONS

<https://elevatedchicago.org/Elevated%20Community%20Engagement%20Principles-Digital.pdf>

ONENYC 2050: A VIBRANT DEMOCRACY

<https://onenyc.cityofnewyork.us/strategies/a-vibrant-democracy/>

NEXT STEPS

- The Google Docs in which Committee members brainstormed objectives will remain open, so Committee members can continue to refine and synthesize their thoughts if they wish.
- Next month, the Advisory Committee will develop policy recommendations for community engagement from these objectives.
- The next meeting will also feature an update on the Equity and Resiliency Data Dashboard, a companion project to be released in conjunction with the We Will Plan that will allow the public to view key metrics from all the pillars in the Plan by neighborhood.
- In April, the pillar Co-Chairs will present a report on their progress.