C I T Y   O F   C A M B R I D G E
Community Development Department

CDD Guidelines for Pre-Application Early Community Engagement

The Planning Board requires, in Section 5 of the Planning Board's Rules, that projects seeking a Special Permit conduct a pre-application early community engagement process including at least one community meeting hosted by the Applicant. These guidelines provide additional suggestions and ideas for making the community meeting(s) as inclusive, meaningful, and productive as possible.

Early community engagement is an important part of project review that provides opportunities for community members to learn about a potential development project prior to any formal public hearings, allows interested parties to have a dialogue about the major concerns and issues that may be associated with a project, and provides useful feedback to the Planning Board to inform the Board's future review, when required.

The extent of outreach and engagement may vary depending on the location, scale and impact of the project, as well as the communities that are being engaged. Early Community Engagement options may include:
- Meetings with established neighborhood groups (where applicable)
- Open houses
- Informative and/or interactive websites
- Distributing information through e-mail, mailings, flyers and on-site postings
- Informal conversations with interested parties.

Applicants should center equity and inclusion in their engagement by following the approach suggested in CDD's Community Engagement Handbook. The "Public Meetings" chapter in the Handbook has detailed recommendations on how to host community meetings.

1. Applicants are encouraged to schedule a meeting with CDD staff before initiating a pre-application Early Community Engagement process to identify historically excluded and underheard communities, create an appropriate list of contacts, and decide on an appropriate combination of notification methods.

2. Community meeting(s) should be accessible to all who want to attend. They should be held at a location that community members frequently go to and at a time that is convenient for most community members to attend, with both in-person and virtual options to participate. Additionally, Applicants should schedule community meeting(s) in coordination with existing neighborhood groups and community-based organizations to avoid any conflicts.

3. Community meeting(s) should be advertised by mail or e-mail no less than <u>two weeks prior to</u> the meeting date and should be located on-site or in close proximity to the site of a proposed project.

4. An appropriate list of community members who should be directly notified should include:
    a) Abutters;
    b) Nearby residents;
    c) Community groups in the project's neighborhood and adjoining neighborhoods. (A running list of existing neighborhood and community groups is available on the CDD website: http://www.cambridgema.gov/CDD/planud/neighborhoodorganizations.aspx);
    d) Community-based organizations; and
    e) Leaders and stakeholders from historically excluded and underheard communities.

5. In addition to targeted notification, outreach methods could be expanded to inform and engage a wider range of community members who might be interested in a project. Possible methods of notification may include:
    a) Informative and/or interactive websites;
    b) Neighborhood and other e-mail lists;
    c) Social media; and
    d) Posters or signs posted on-site or at other locations frequented by community members such as places of worship, hair salons and barber shops, playgrounds, convenience stores, check-cashing sites, and laundromats.

6. Community meeting(s) can take many different formats. A typical format of community meeting(s) includes a short presentation about the proposal followed by a Q&A session and discussion session. Community meeting(s) could also include an "open house" format allowing community members to come in and out at different times to review the proposal and ask questions. Community meeting(s) are meant to provide opportunities for community members to receive information, ask questions, and provide comments in real time. The community meeting(s) can be conducted in a hybrid format that allows community members to attend in person or remotely, or as separate in-person and online meetings. When planning a virtual meeting, refer to the section "Examine Technology Access and Privilege" on page 114 of the Handbook for recommendations on an inclusive approach.

7. Throughout the pre-application community engagement process, the following information should be presented along with other information that might be relevant to the specific project. If the community engagement process has multiple phases, more general information might be presented for discussion at an earlier phase, with more detailed plans presented at a later phase.

   a) An initial site analysis addressing site opportunities and constraints, the uses of all adjacent buildings, traffic conditions and major environmental considerations, and the zoning of the site and adjacent properties;

   b) A drawing of existing site context indicating topography of the site and the location of structures and prominent landscape elements on or abutting the site;

   c) Photos showing the facades of adjacent buildings, trees on the site, general streetscape character;

   d) A three-dimensional zoning envelope study that illustrates the maximum allowable floor area and building bulk under current zoning;

   e) A description of the Applicant's objectives with regard to the site development including tentative program mix; and

   f) Preliminary massing studies, plan(s) and rendering(s).

   g) Information about how to attend any relevant Planning Board hearings and provide comments to the Planning Board.

8. It is strongly recommended that presentation materials be developed using the "Plain Language Checklist" in the Handbook and made available online for community members who were unable to attend.