

conducting a meaningful input session

A GUIDE FOR GATHERING COMMUNITY INPUT

Our built environment should be shaped by the valuable knowledge within our communities, especially when taxpayer support is given to development projects. The following guidelines are designed to make sure that meaningful community input is gathered and applied in the development process, and that projects better contribute to equity in the end result.

Though the developer is primarily responsible for this community engagement process, the community council is also encouraged to participate in, document, and/or oversee the process where possible.

1

**MEET THE
BASIC CRITERIA**

2

**FACILITATE
THE SESSION**

3

**DOCUMENT
THE INPUT**

4

**APPLY
THE INPUT**

1

MEET THE BASIC CRITERIA

The Rubric encourages the use of input sessions in addition to community council meetings. In order to score points, the session must:

- be open to the public, and welcome all neighborhood residents
- be held during evening or weekend hours, outside of the typical work day
- be held at a location that is within close walking distance (around 5 mins) of the proposed development site to eliminate potential transportation difficulties for those who will be most impacted
- be held in an ADA accessible space
- be announced to the community council and other community anchor institutions in advance (We strongly recommend that it be announced at the council's general body meeting and shared in communications with the general body no less than one week ahead of the session.)

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

The criteria above are meant to remove some of the most basic barriers to civic participation. Where possible, we encourage you to take these additional steps to maximize accessibility for residents.

- provide childcare on site during the meeting so that parents can participate
- provide food so residents juggling many responsibilities can attend
- hold the meeting at a location on a public transit line
- hold the meeting in a public space-- like a school, library, or rec/community center-- that feels welcoming to all people (avoid bars, because some people are in recovery; avoid expressly religious spaces in case people outside that faith may feel uncomfortable; avoid spaces that are typically exclusive or expensive to enter or use, because they can feel intimidating to some; etc.)

2

FACILITATE THE SESSION

The bulk of this session should be centered on answering questions from residents and listening to their thoughts and responses. It helps to have someone in council leadership facilitate, if possible, but the developer can run a productive session if the following guidelines are followed. Note that participants should be offered opportunities to provide both verbal and written input. Also, there must be opportunity for open commentary that is not steered by specifically focused questions. This allows participants to speak freely and address their relevant priorities and needs, instead of being limited only to responses asked of them.

1. Share the agenda for the session. It is helpful to point out the structure that will be used, and how/when people can participate.
2. Start with a brief overview of the plans and materials, no longer than 5 minutes.
3. A brief Q&A should follow. Invite residents to ask questions (before the comment section begins) if they need greater clarity about the plans. The developer may respond by providing the relevant information.
4. Open the floor to comments and discussion.
 - Residents and stakeholders should be invited to share their relevant knowledge and opinions. They should also be encouraged to voice any support they may have for comments and issues raised by other participants.
 - Participation from the developer's representatives should be limited to responding to questions as asked, and providing factual information as needed.
 - Each speaker should be limited to 2 minutes at a time, and no participant should speak twice until everyone has had the opportunity to speak once.
5. At least 10 minutes at the end must be saved for written feedback. The developer should provide both a mailing address and email address where input can be sent (to be shared with those who could not attend).

3

DOCUMENT THE INPUT

In order for an input session to be useful to a developer and the community in this process, input must be captured in written record, for future reference.

- There should be at least two people taking detailed notes for the duration of the meeting-- one member of the developer's team, and one neighborhood resident (someone in council leadership is ideal, but it can be anyone committed to taking good notes). Note takers should do their best to capture the content of comments, discussion, and information shared.
- The number of people in attendance should be recorded, and, if possible, the number of neighborhood residents
- Notes taken by the community member should be submitted to council leadership for review. The developer may keep the notes taken by their representative.
- Surveys should be gathered and kept by the developer to inform plans. Copies of this input must be provided to community council leadership for review.

3

APPLY THE INPUT

We should expect that different kinds of input will be offered, as people come from a range of experiences, perspectives, and circumstances. It is important to our democracy that we listen with respect to different voices; it is equally important that we consider power dynamics and fairness in how we utilize what is shared. The following guidelines help both developers and communities in calculating how input should impact development results.

- Input that concerns basic human rights or serious quality of life issues should be prioritized over aesthetic preferences and more trivial concerns
- Input from residents should be prioritized over input from non-resident stakeholders

APPLY THE INPUT (CONT.)

- Critical mass is important-- if a particular need or suggestion has widespread support or is raised multiple times across a significant number of people, it should be among the priorities to be addressed. Developers are not expected to accommodate every single suggestion, especially if they are relatively obscure and/or voiced by only one or two people.
- Some input may run counter to just and fair practices, and therefore should not be prioritized, even if voiced by a majority. If feedback is offered based on harmful stereotypes, or if a suggestion will negatively impact or discriminate against groups with little economic and political power, it should be removed from the list of priorities. (Example: opposition to low-income housing based on the myth that new tenants will bring crime; this perpetuates the stereotype that poor people are criminal, and prevents much-needed access to housing at lower price points)
- Concerns that are in the collective interest of the neighborhood should be prioritized, but care should also be taken to understand who will be most impacted by development and how. Clearly, those who live very close to the development site stand to be more heavily impacted. We must also consider who uses the existing site and what may be at stake for them.

If popular feedback is at odds with that of those who live closest to or most utilize the development site, adhere to these basic rules:

1. Prioritize basic human needs, dignity, and quality of life of those most impacted.
2. If basic human needs, dignity, or quality of life are not in question for those most impacted, prioritize more popular feedback.