



ACTIVE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



Active Community Engagement

Public engagement is a process that brings people together to address issues of common importance, to solve shared problems, and to bring about positive community change. Effective public engagement invites citizens to get involved in deliberation and dialogue on public issues that may impact themselves or their community. It further helps leaders and decision makers better understand the perspectives, opinions, and concerns of citizens and stakeholders.

The City of Maryland Heights strives to be a regional leader in promoting community, diversity, inclusion, equity, and active citizenship. Efforts such as Maryland Heights University help all citizens understand their local government, and there are ample opportunities for citizens to participate on various boards and commissions. This helps residents learn to know, respect, and help each other regardless of differences. By embracing diversity and inclusion, and recognizing marginalized voices, community leaders successfully find common ground on complex issues by respecting differences and seeking out shared goals.

Successful comprehensive plans, in part, owe their success to communication and the degree that public interest and awareness is created for the process, for policy development, and for implementation. Elected and appointed officials are wise to promote the use of extensive public consultation throughout the planning process. Further, robust public engagement greatly reduces public apprehension and concern through ongoing listening and learning.



GOAL: ENCOURAGE AN ENVIRONMENT THAT PROMOTES COMMUNITY AWARENESS AND INVOLVEMENT IN NEIGHBORHOOD ENHANCEMENT.

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OBJECTIVES:

- *Enhance resident and civic organization capacity to shape their communities.*
- *Explore ways to offer improved access to City services through enhanced technologies.*
- *Encourage involvement by residents and business owners in the planning process.*
- *Involve residents in the creation of their neighborhood plans.*
- *Investigate and implement appropriate activities to assist in creating a sense of community identity.*
- *Support the efforts of the “creative class” as they work to enhance the vibrancy of the City’s neighborhoods.*
- *Continue to recognize the importance of the arts.*

ACTIONS

The following actions may be undertaken to implement the objectives of this goal:

- ⇒ Continue to support citizen organizations in their efforts to improve their communities.
- ⇒ Expand civic outreach efforts to more effectively involve traditionally underserved individuals, such as youth and marginalized voices.
- ⇒ Work with schools, places of worship, and non-profit organizations to promote involvement and improve neighborhoods.
- ⇒ Provide a forum for residents to provide input on residential planning issues.
- ⇒ Add additional entrance features along the City’s arterial roadway and interstate highway networks.
- ⇒ Pursue opportunities for public art throughout the community.
- ⇒ Coordinate with, and promote the activities of, local and regional arts organizations.
- ⇒ Promote the City’s diversity and learn from residents of different cultures.



Objective: Enhance resident and civic organization capacity to shape their communities.

The City will strive to support neighborhood organizations and other local civic groups in their efforts to facilitate local events hosted and attended by residents. The City will further support efforts that foster interaction between generations of Maryland Heights residents. The City will continue to support and encourage volunteering for public service in a variety of capacities, support the Maryland Heights University and Citizens Police Academy, and participation in parks and recreation programs.

Objective: Explore ways to offer improved access to City services through enhanced technologies.

The City will continue efforts to notify, inform, consult, or collaborate with community members through websites, web applications, and innovative social media applications, as appropriate. Combined with traditional engagement techniques, online engagement strives for an equitable and inclusive planning process. In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic changed the rules and the process for public engagement. The Department of Community Development had to quickly implement a plan to provide essential services without direct contact with the public. The City will continue to evolve service provision as technology evolves.

Objective: Encourage involvement by residents and business owners in the planning process.

The City will utilize existing and future communication networks, including neighborhood organizations, not-for-profits, government mailing lists, etc., as avenues for creating awareness about decision-making, policies, and programs. In conversations involving all units of local government, the City will ensure that a diversity of opinions are respected and that collaborative efforts focus on actions to advance an overall common good. Efforts will be ongoing to determine what communication channels are the most effective, recognizing that preferences may change over time, among different demographic groups, and technology advancements.

We will continuously utilize a variety of methods to outreach to members of the community - those who live, work, and play in Maryland Heights. We are aware that not every resident has access to technology and will make sure that avenue of communication stays open. Further, the City will actively engage the business community in the development of local policies and regulations that may impact their ability to invest in the City while providing important services to residents.





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When the public is directly and continually involved in the deliberation process, the resulting decisions are:

INCLUSIVE

Robust public participation is intended to be inclusive and to engage a diverse cross-section of the community. Maryland Heights strives to reshape the engagement model, taking outreach in new directions and using innovative approaches, platforms, and events, all with a focus on more diverse and ongoing participation. This is accomplished through the identification of key leaders and stakeholders, actively reaching out to the many diverse communities in the City, and seeking out and removing barriers to participation.

MEANINGFUL

The plan seeks to maximize meaningful participation by moving beyond typical public meetings and encouraging dialogue and deliberation among participants. As appropriate, this can be achieved through larger stakeholder/community workshops and public meetings, combined with smaller focus groups, where stakeholders representing different perspectives may have the opportunity to discuss issues and concerns with one another.

PROACTIVE

Maryland Heights will be proactive in disseminating information to the public regularly through the web site, regular newsletter updates, and other online activities. Being proactive also means that we will try to identify and address issues and concerns before they become unmanageable. The intent is to keep a dialogue going with the public on occasional issues that arise or large-scale projects as they arise.

RESPONSIVE

Maryland Heights will be responsive and react quickly to comments and questions from the public. Any individual that has taken the time to participate should find out how their input has influenced the direction of a study, plan, or project especially when it comes time to develop recommendations. For example, email sent to planning@marylandheights.com is disseminated to the entire planning staff and is generally answered quickly.





Objective: Involve residents in the creation of their neighborhood plans.

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The recommendations of residents related to distinctive neighborhoods are intended to help the City of Maryland Heights capitalize on its future growth. Deliberate and strategic planning efforts in neighborhoods may include the re-designation of some future land uses, encouragement of high-quality urban design with a focus on placemaking, transportation considerations, and economic development through inclusion of and equitable treatment for all neighborhood residents, while recognizing marginalized voices.

Objective: Investigate and implement appropriate activities to assist in creating a sense of community identity.

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Over the years, the City of Maryland Heights has taken proactive steps to establish and promote its unique identity. This effort is evident in the two Maryland Heights entry signs, the new Community Center, and throughout the City's park system. Residents want to see this trend continue with additional focus on enhancing city gateways, gathering spaces, retail venues (particularly Westport Plaza), entertainment venues, and the Dorsett Road Great Streets Project to continue to create an inviting presence and enhance the City's connectivity and sense of place. Residents, visitors, and business owners alike seek out and value opportunities to connect and interact, and there is strong support for preserving and expanding neighborhood gathering spaces, community events, and engagement of the City's diverse populations.





Objective: Support the efforts of the “creative class” as they work to enhance the vibrancy of the City’s neighborhoods.

The City has, and will continue to foster the arts and culture sector. In doing so, the City’s image becomes more defined, visitors become interested in the City, and a synergy between residents, business owners, and visitors is created. Further, capitalizing on local assets allows for improved and sustainable economic outcomes.



Objective: Continue to recognize the importance of the arts.

At the heart of these objectives is the recognition of the vital role that art and culture play in enhancing Maryland Heights’ character and image. The Maryland Heights Cultural Arts Commission is comprised of residents and business members appointed by the Mayor and City Council to:

- Recommend programs that encourage and aid appreciation of, awareness of, participation in and utilization of the cultural arts benefiting all citizens of Maryland Heights.
- Encourage cooperation and coordination among individuals, organizations, and institutions concerned with the cultural arts.
- Make recommendations to the city council as to desirable legislation concerning actions, plans, or programs designed to promote cultural arts in the city.
- Assist in disseminating news and information to, and securing the cooperation of, the residents and businesses of Maryland Heights concerning the cultural arts.

