



## **Public Participation Plan**

**City of Whitehall**

405 E. Colby Street  
Whitehall, MI 49461

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## INTRODUCTION

In preparing a Master Plan, it is essential to work with residents to identify the issues, challenges and needs that are unique to the community. As part of the planning process, the following is the public participation plan which outlines how elected officials, City staff, and boards & commissions engage the public throughout the planning process.

## PARTICIPATION GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

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The City shall conduct proactive and inclusionary public participation techniques during all phases of the comprehensive master planning process.

The City shall foster a cycle of seeking public input and public review of results.

The City shall conduct all aspects of resident participation in an open manner, with freedom of access to the participation process for all interested persons.

The City shall engage a diverse set of community stakeholders in planning, land use, and development decisions.

The City shall encourage the involvement of residents most affected by the proposed planning, land use, or development project as well as work with applicants to solicit input from neighboring properties if desired.

The City shall seek to identify and involve a broad and representative cross-section of the community's residents.

The City shall make reasonable efforts to ensure continuity of involvement of residents and community groups throughout all stages of the planning and review process.

The City shall utilize effective and equitable avenues for distributing information and receiving comments.

The City shall support and encourage effective participation. Information shall be made available in a timely manner, so as to enable residents to be involved in important decisions at various stages of the review and approval process.

The City shall record the results of public engagement to the extent feasible and provide summaries back to the public.

The City shall assist the developer on soliciting public input if needed.



## STATE REGULATIONS

State of Michigan legislation details the minimum requirements for public participation. The City of Whitehall abides by this legislation and strives to be proactive in soliciting public input for all projects. Below are the laws regarding public input set by the state.

### Open Meetings Act (PA 267 of 1976)

The Michigan Open Meetings Act was created to require certain meetings of certain public bodies to be open to the public, to require notice and keeping of minutes of the meetings.

The following captures important highlights from the act. In accordance with PA 267 of 1976, the City of Whitehall will hold meetings in City Hall at 405 E. Colby Street, Whitehall, Michigan, which is accessible to the public. The public will be notified within 10 days of the first meeting of a public body in each calendar or fiscal year; the body will publicly post a list stating the dates, times, and places of all its regular meetings at City Hall. If there is a change in schedule, within three days of the meeting in which the change is made, the public body will post a notice stating the new dates, times, and place of regular meetings. For special and irregular meetings, public bodies will post a notice indicating the date, time, and place at least 18 hours before the meetings. A regular meeting of a public body which is recessed for more than 35 hours can only be reconvened if a notice is posted 18 hours in advance. Public bodies will hold emergency sessions without a written notice or time constraints if the public health, safety or welfare is severely threatened and if two-thirds of the body's members vote to hold the emergency meeting. Any resident can request that public bodies put them on a mailing list so that they are notified in advance of all meetings by contacting the following:

**City of Whitehall**  
Attn: City Clerk  
405 E. Colby Street  
Whitehall, MI 49461

### Planning Enabling Act (PA 33 of 2008)

The Michigan Planning Enabling Act determines the rules and regulations local governments must follow when preparing the Master Plan.

The following captures important highlights from this act. In accordance with PA 33 of 2008, the following parties will be notified via first class mail, personal delivery or electronic mail by the planning commission of the intent to plan and request the recipient's cooperation and comment:

Muskegon County

West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission (WMSRDC)

Each public utility company, and public transportation agency owning or operating a public utility, or public transportation system within the City of Whitehall

Muskegon County Road Commission

Michigan Department of Transportation

After the draft master plan has been submitted to the legislative body for review and approval for distribution, the draft plan will be submitted to the previously listed entities for review. Before approving a proposed master plan, a planning commission will hold not less than one public hearing on the proposed master plan. The hearing will be held after the expiration of the deadline for comment as outlined in the act. The planning commission will give notice of the time and place of the public hearing not less than 15 days before the hearing by publication in a newspaper of general circulation within the City of Whitehall.

The planning commission will also submit notice of the public hearing by first class mail, personal delivery or electronic mail to the previously listed entities for review. After the adoption of the master plan, a planning commission may publish and distribute copies of the master plan or of any report, and employ other means of publicity and education.

## KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Below is a list of groups that are able to assist in and enhance the public participation process. During each public event the list will be reviewed in order to make sure that the appropriate people and groups are involved.

<b>Local residents</b>	<b>City Council</b>
<b>Downtown Business Group</b>	<b>City Boards and Commissions</b>
<b>Large employers</b>	<b>White Lake Chamber of Commerce</b>
<b>Neighboring municipalities</b>	<b>Commercial business owners</b>
<b>Public employees</b>	<b>Real estate professionals</b>
<b>Religious groups</b>	<b>Senior groups</b>
<b>Social organizations</b>	<b>Students and student groups</b>

The City of Whitehall is fortunate to be full of active residents that strive to make their community better. However, the City is always trying to get more residents involved. The City will use various methods of communication to attempt to reach a variety of audiences.

## PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

The City provides Whitehall residents and stakeholders with numerous opportunities to be involved in the planning, review, and approval process for planning and zoning applications, planning documents, and development projects.

### City Council

The City of Whitehall uses the council-manager form of government. The City Council, consisting of seven (7) members elected on a non-partisan basis, appoints a City Manager to handle the day-to-day management and operations of the City. The Mayor, selected by the City Council, acts as the official head of government and presides at all City Council meetings. The Mayor Pro-Tem, also selected by the City Council, assumes mayoral duties in the absence of the mayor. The Council enacts ordinances, resolutions, and orders; adopts the annual budget; approves the financing of all City operations; and authorizes contracts on behalf of the City.

### Boards and Commissions

The City encourages participation in local government planning and policy decisions. Therefore, all residents are invited to apply for appointments to City Boards and Commissions. Through these opportunities, civic minded residents become involved in their local government; these groups may provide recommendations to the City Council on a variety of topics and issues. The members of the Boards and Commissions help to analyze options and influence important decisions on behalf of the community. As a result, the City benefits from the vast knowledge, experience and expertise of its residents. Board and

Commission Member positions are all voluntary and are appointed by the Mayor, with the concurrence of City Council. Once appointed, the time commitment for each Board and Commission varies, some meet on a regular schedule, others on an as needed basis. Preparation for some meetings may require additional time obligations. Once committed, attendance at all regularly scheduled meetings is critical.

**Planning Commission** creates a Master Plan for the physical development of the City; reviews rezoning requests, site plans, subdivisions, special land uses and other land use applications.

**Zoning Board of Appeals** interprets and grants variances from provisions of the Zoning Code; conducts hearings and resolves disputes regarding interpretations of the zoning ordinance.

Visit [www.cityofwhitehall.org](http://www.cityofwhitehall.org) for a complete list of boards and commissions in Whitehall and their responsibilities.

## COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

The following basic strategies will be used by the City of Whitehall as part of public outreach and communication:

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<b>Newspaper announcements</b>	<b>Website Postings</b>
<b>Facebook Postings</b>	<b>Fliers</b>
<b>Council Meeting announcements</b>	<b>Postcard mailings</b>
<b>Attachments to water bill</b>	<b>Quarterly newsletter</b>
<b>Public meetings</b>	

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The following methods may be used to gather the community's input on specific development proposals or the community vision for the Master Plan and other planning and zoning documents. The City may use these various activities to provide additional opportunities for residents, public interest groups, or other stakeholders to directly participate in the development review process or the creation/amendment of plans and strategies.

The City shall communicate the results of the public participation methods in a consistent and transparent manner through the appropriate avenues of communication listed previously. More than one method of communication may be used in order to reach a broader audience and the affected persons. Those responsible for organizing the specific community engagement activity may also coordinate the communication of public participation outcomes. The results of any of the methods of engagement and outreach will be included in the report or plan generated based on the information collected during these meetings, and support the development review process.

### Surveys

The City may employ surveys to identify key resident concerns. The surveys may be distributed through various methods of delivery to ensure the broadest reach, based on the nature of the target group (e.g., mail, e-mail, website access, copies available at City facilities). The responsible party will compile the survey results following the closing of the survey. The survey results may be posted online, published in the City's newsletter, and communicated to the City Council, residents, survey participants, investors, developers, and other stakeholders.

### Steering Committees

The City may organize steering committees consisting of residents, business owners, board and commission members, and other stakeholders. Members may be selected based on their expertise, interest, and background as they relate to the focus of the individual steering committee. This structure will allow for focused discussions related to a specific topic. The results of the meetings and discussions of the steering committees will be incorporated into the plan generated based on the information collected during these meetings.

### One-on-One Interviews

The City may hold interviews with various stakeholders to get specific information on a topic. In general, the information collected during interviews will be kept confidential unless requested otherwise. The information may be compiled and analyzed together with other information collected from stakeholders on a specific topic.



### **Walking Tours**

Tours offer an opportunity for City staff, residents, and other stakeholders to identify and discuss specific development areas or topics. City staff or consultants will facilitate tours, depending on the nature of the development or planning project. The facilitator(s) may take notes during the tour and share them with the participants and the community. The results of these events will be included in any report or plan generated based on the community feedback collected during these tours.

### **Website/Social Networking**

The City may use various digital tools of communication, as needed and appropriate. Webpages may be created for specific development or planning projects as appropriate. The City currently uses online tools of community engagement and shall continue to explore the use of new tools. For projects of great importance to the community, the City may employ social networking (e.g., Facebook, Website) to share notices about upcoming development related meetings or Master Plan updates.

## **OUTREACH STRATEGIES**

There are many situations in which the City will solicit public input for a plan or project. Public participation increases the likelihood of a plans success by engaging stakeholders and fostering a sense of ownership. Broad engagement in the planning process also helps to prevent delays caused by unforeseen issues. Engagement efforts will vary depending upon the type, intensity, and location of a project or plan.

### **Master Plan Update**

The Master Plan is the visioning document for the City which future developments and policy are created from. Therefore, it is the most important planning process to get the broadest engagement and most public input. A variety of communication tools will be used with an effort to gain attention and involvement from the widest sample of residents, representative of the entire City of Whitehall. At least two workshops or visioning forums will be held. Notice will be given to all residents when the planning process begins and when a draft plan has been created. A public forum will be held to review the draft document.

### **Zoning Ordinance Update**

The Zoning Ordinance is the regulating document which helps forward the vision of the City as well as promote the public health, safety and general welfare. Since the document establishes comprehensive zoning regulations and provides for the administration, enforcement and amendment of those regulations, it is important that the public is informed of and can give input about updates. Zoning regulation is based off of the master plan and therefore doesn't need as extensive of an input process., informing and educating the public about updates or revisions of the ordinance is important.

### **Downtown Development Plan**

The Downtown Development Plan is the guiding document for the vision and success of the downtown. Downtown development planning is integral to the success of a city and its economic development. Public input and engagement in this process is important. Education on topics, such as Tax Increment Financing, make this process easier as well as visioning techniques that can help the public understand various planning concepts. Public visioning sessions, websites, interactive mapping, and steering committees can all be useful in creating the downtown development plan.

### **Parks and Recreation Plan**

Similar to the Master Plan process, multiple modes of communication will be used to gain public participation: workshops, focus groups, surveys, websites, and/or alternative methods are useful in recreation planning.

## **COMMUNICATING RESULTS**

Communicating back to the public the information gathered during the public involvement process will result in another layer of transparency and a greater understanding from the public that we value public input and are actively seeking to involve the residents in the community. Municipalities have many venues of communication: newspaper, newsletters, the City website, and social media. The appropriate venue to communicate, who is responsible for this communication, and how soon after the public participation event are all dependent on the situation. There is no one way of communicating. The following is a list of ways the City will strive to communicate public feedback.

### **Public meetings**

City Council, Planning Commission, and all other municipal board and commission meetings minutes shall be posted on the City's website.

### **Surveys**

Surveys created by City staff will be compiled by a designated staff person, and the City shall have results posted after the survey completion. The results, or a link to the results, may be posted online and on social media and published in the City newsletter.

### **Open houses / Community workshops**

A City official will be responsible for taking notes during public open houses or community workshops and getting names, addresses, and emails of all in attendance. In addition, the results of these events shall be sent to participants via email, and the meeting summary shall be publicized at other public meetings such as City Council and Planning Commission.

## **EVALUATION AND IMPROVEMENT**

Continuous review of our public input processes will ensure that the City stays connected to the community. The residents are what make Whitehall such a great community and, therefore, it's important to reflect on communication and involvement efforts to verify that optimal methods are used. A Communication Event Satisfaction Survey will be used at each event (see appendix). Results can be analyzed by keeping records of participation, including the types of communication used, the quality and quantity of comments received, and the number of participants involved. The hired consultant or staff will be in charge of recording participation.

Each plan and project shall include a Public Participation Review. The Public Participation Review sample can be found in the appendix. Documentation will contribute to a public participation process that is continuously evolving to better obtain public input. To insure that methods are effective, the Public Participation Plan will be reviewed annually and updated when necessary. Methods that have failed will not be removed from the Public Participation Plan, but will be reviewed and documented so that the same mistakes will not be made in the future.

## **CLOSING**

Public participation, when properly executed, builds community consensus and strengthens sense of place. Creating a culture of collaborative visioning enriches democracy by allowing residents to voice their ideas, not just their complaints. This plan is to be used and reviewed as a daily guide to best incorporate the public into decisions that affect their community.



## CITY OF WHITEHALL COMMUNITY EVENT SATISFACTION SURVEY

**Name of Event:**

**Date:**

**How did you hear about this event?**

- City Website
- Facebook
- Newsletter
- White Lake Beacon
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Was this event held at a convenient location?**

- Yes **Comment:**
- No

**Was it held at a convenient time? If not, what is a convenient time? \_\_\_\_\_**

- Yes
- No

**Are you glad you came to this event?**

- Yes
- No

**Would you improve this event in any way? If yes, how?**

- No
- Yes:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



**CITY OF WHITEHALL  
INTERNAL PUBLIC PARTICIPATION REVIEW**

**Name of Event:**

**Date:**

**Type of Public Participation:**

**How was the event advertised?**

**How many people attended the event?**

**Was there a group that was under-represented?**

**Who facilitated the event?**

**Are there ways this could be improved for future events?**