

Increasing Renters' Participation in City and Civic Life



Prepared by

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Prepared on Behalf of

City of Brooklyn Park Department of Administration

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Increasing Renters' Participation in City and Civic Life Brooklyn Park, Minnesota

The City of Brooklyn Park, MN makes every effort to increase and improve community engagement for its residents. The city's community engagement department has recognized their renters as the segment of their population as less engaged to community resources, issues and opportunities. To assure all residents of the city have equitable access to information, essential resources and are empowered to actively participate in improving the quality of life in their neighborhood, the city has requested that the students recommend a set of strategies that improve their interaction with, and engagement of, renters in Brooklyn Park. The city hopes that these strategies will enable them to serve more effectively in 1) providing necessary information to all residents, 2) collecting residents' feedback on important city-related matters, 3) connecting their residents to their communities' resources, and 4) encouraging renters to actively engage in their neighborhoods.

With this background in mind, we examine a few of the barriers that cause renters to hold back from active community participation, discuss the activities that the city undertakes to address these barriers, and recommend a set of alternative strategies that will help the city reach its goal of improved renter involvement.

Issues and Barriers

After reading reports and literature and meeting with city staff, our team has identified the following set of issues that we deem as barriers to community participation. The scope of these barriers are those most apparent. Additional direct interactions and possible interviews with renters may reveal new barriers. Should such efforts be undertaken, we recommend that the interviews are conducted by a neutral party; someone who is not associated with the city, particularly the law enforcement.

Lack of trust and political efficacy: Trust in governing system is low. The lack of trust may have stemmed from the renters' interaction with law enforcement or lack productive interaction with other government bodies.

Interaction with law enforcement: Most of the renters' interactions are with the city's code-enforcement, rent inspection, and crime prevention bodies. Such interactions further enforce the residents' suspicion of government.

Lack of translation of city documents: City's document, which advertise the city's services for its residents, are often in English, which is often useless for immigrant population of the city, who are unable to read the English-written material.

Other: There are a couple of other issues, which we deem minor, and can be addressed by the city by adopting minor corrective actions. They are:

- City sends out printed newsletters to the city's residents but the newsletters are not delivered to the apartments. This issue can easily be corrected by the city.
- The city has contracted translation services for residents who are not able to speak English. However, the translation services are not fully utilized. This issue can easily be

corrected by minor corrective action, such as basic training to city staff who would relay calls made in foreign languages to the contract-service providers.

Current Strategies

The City of Brooklyn Park currently has minimal engagement with renters. A majority of the interaction that renters have with the City is through code enforcement and police officers. The city's current strategies are as follows:

- 1) Rental inspections in multifamily units are conducted every other year. This is the primary channel of communication and information sharing between renters and city staff.
- 2) The police department holds community conversations frequently throughout the year, often in areas of concentrated renters. Renters also serve on crime prevention groups that interact with law enforcement.
- 3) Property managers serve on a coalition that meets throughout the year. The City has used property managers as middlemen to understand the renter population.
- 4) The Park Pages are a packet of activities and events happening around the city. This resource is mailed out to single family homes but not to renters in multi-family dwellings.

Proposed Strategies

To establish a stronger relationship between renters and the city, we conducted a spatial and demographic analysis of Brooklyn Park renters. We met with city staff and key informants to understand the current engagement climate. Our proposed strategies of engagement renters are:

- 1) Getting on the right track: Improve current communication channels with renters and less engaged populations. IAP-2 Inform¹: Renters have balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding opportunities in Brooklyn Park. This step should be completed during spring 2017.
 - a. Most of the immigrants living in Brooklyn Park are renters. All flyers that include information about major events in the city and other relevant announcements are printed in English. Because there are, primarily, five major languages in the City, apart from English, we recommend that the City of Brooklyn Park translate the flyer in these major languages on one side of the flyer, while maintaining the original English on the other side. These documents can be printed in bulk and distributed to multi-family buildings using a newspaper rack in front entrances.
 - b. Park Pages are not currently delivered to apartment units, where majority of renters live. We recommend that the City assures the delivery of Park Pages to all tenants of multi-family dwellings. A bulk amount of Park Pages can be placed in newspaper racks in front entrances of multi-family buildings.
 - c. The City provides every new home buyer with a Welcome Wagon, which includes a set of information about existing services and resource in the city. We recommend that the City extend the Welcome Wagon distribution to renters. The city can identify the most important resources and compile a packet to be printed

¹ International Association for Public Participation (2007). IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation

in bulk. We also recommend that the City engage the property managers in dissemination of this information to assure all renters are made aware of the information and the resources that the city offers.

- 2) Direct Renter Engagement: For use in Parks Plan or Comprehensive Plan. IAP-2 Consult: The city obtains public feedback and builds trust. Ozawa's "4 C's" of trust (caring, competence, commitment, and consistency) are strongly encouraged². This step occurs during summer 2017.
 - a. Select 'Captains' from the community: Identify community leaders from classes at North Hennepin, the Youth Council, and referrals from property managers. Given the financial and time limitations of Brooklyn Park staff, it is imperative for sustainable renter engagement that a citizen committee is formed to partner with the city. Once referred, the captains will be elected by vote at a community engagement event.
 - b. Survey residents: Captains will be compensated to survey residents of multi-family dwellings and to plan events for the resident-city engagement. Five to ten captains will be selected and will be paid \$15 per hour for 5 hours per month (\$750 per month maximum).
- 3) Community Building, IAP-2 Involve: the city will partner with the public to understand concerns. This step will occur during summer and fall of 2017.
 - a. Community Picnic: During the warm months, the City can host a handful of community picnics nearby the rental properties. Flyers to advertise the events can be placed in newspaper racks inside apartment buildings. City staff from all departments will set up booths at these events to inform attendees and promote positive engagement – particularly with police officers.
 - b. Taste of Brooklyn Park: Invite local restaurants to promote their business while celebrating the cultural diversity of Brooklyn Park.
 - c. Mural or Banner: Engage youth in afterschool programs in apartments and Zanewood, ask community members at picnics to vote on a mural/banner design. The winning mural design will be painted by community members on Zanewood or another building near the apartment buildings (or on banners to be hung in five prominent locations).
- 4) Tenant Organizing Tables, IAP-2 Collaborate and Empower: tenants will identify solutions and have direct decision-making power for 2018 planning. This step will occur during fall and winter 2017.
 - a. City staff will host a monthly "meeting" at different multi-family dwellings near the first of the month. Staff will sit behind a table to share ideas with residents. Staff can have resources for renters and provide them with tenant rights training, printed in the many languages of Brooklyn Park. An expectation of captains is that they will set the agenda for these meetings. These meetings can be used to develop a list of action items for city planning based on renter feedback.

Additional Information

² Ozawa, C.P. (2012). Collaborative resilience: Moving through crisis to opportunity. Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

This section intends to answer/comment on the email that was sent by Ms. Lidiya Girma, Brooklyn Park's Neighborhood Relations Specialist.

Division Capacity: The task of Neighborhood Relations is not normally administered by a specific department in most cities. The City of Brooklyn Park, in that regard, is a step ahead of many other cities in our State; it has incorporated the position of Neighborhood Relations Specialist within the city's administrative structure. However, in cities in which civic engagement is not an integral part of its citizens' lives, the task of facilitating such engagement is daunting.

We, as a group, have not conducted a thorough analysis of the Neighborhood Relations division's capacity; a task that falls outside the scope of this project. However, our observation suggests that the Division requires additional resources, including staff and funding. For example, one of our recommendations is to identify and recruit Captains in each target communities who lead some of the aspects of renters' engagement. Our recommendation also includes compensation for these individuals. Additional financial resources will fund this recommendation.

Application of Recommendation and Times of the Year: The answer to the question of timing is incorporated in our recommendations.

Renter Engagement in Brooklyn Park

Prerequisites to Renter Engagement Opportunities

1

- Send Park Pages to apartments
- Translate key documents, and meeting notices into languages of Brooklyn Park
- Extend Welcome Wagon to renters

2

Build Trust

Find low risk opportunity for engagement, such as mural design for Zanewood or the Brooklyn Blvd Police Station

Visit Afterschool programs at Apartment buildings and get initial drawings for mural

Have picnic, or taste of Brooklyn Park event, and have residents choose from selected options the youth proposed

Recruit potential building captains

Paint the mural

Empower

3

Direct Engagement

Visit Community Organizing Class at North Hennepin and property managers

Choose captains for each apartment building

Regularly meet with captains to talk about problems raised by residents with city government. Meet to develop surveys and plan engagements for them to lead in their apartment buildings

Captains are compensated to administer surveys and hold meetings with residents.

Captains promote events, like the tenant organizing table, and plan events that build ongoing trust

Collaborate

4

Ongoing Engagement

Set up rotating city tenant organizing table in areas of the city with a lot of renters

Provide education about tenant rights and city services in the neighborhoods renters live in

Have a regularly scheduled time renters can talk to city staff with questions and concerns

Inform and Involve

Building Renter Engagement in BROOKLYN PARK

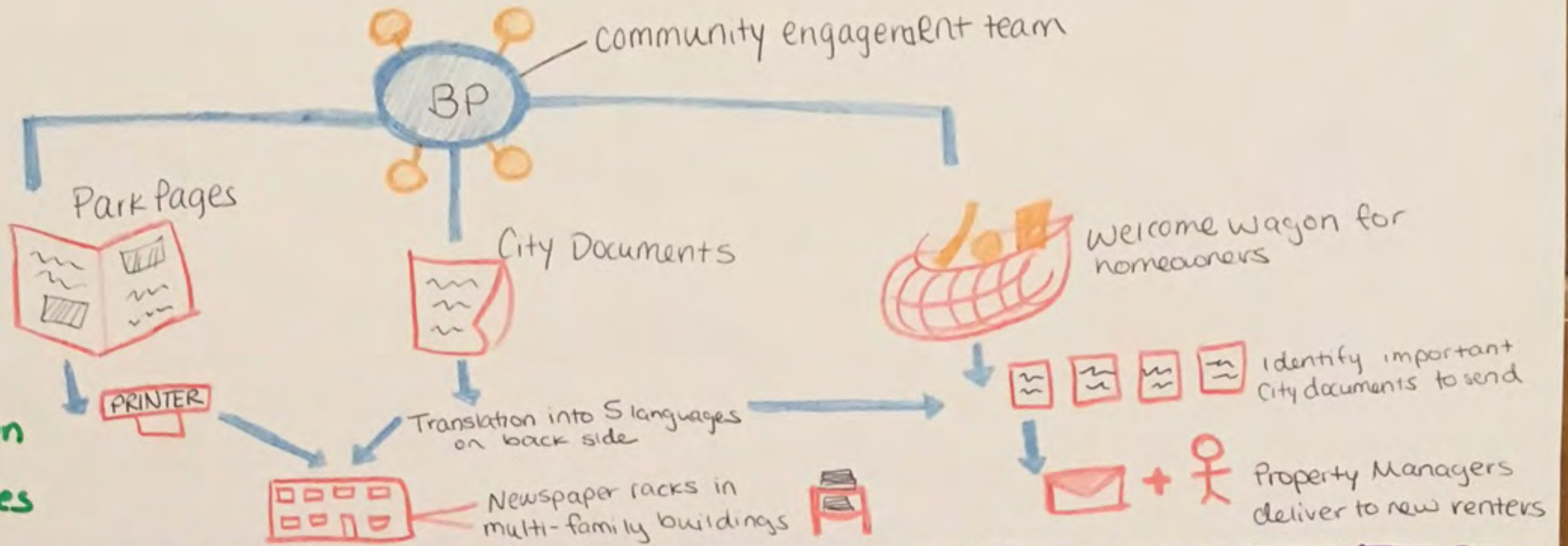
Margaret Vohs
PA 5145: Civic
Participation in Public
Affairs
12/20/2016

Step 1

1: SPRING 2017

IAP2: INFORM

Renters have balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding opportunities in Brooklyn Park.



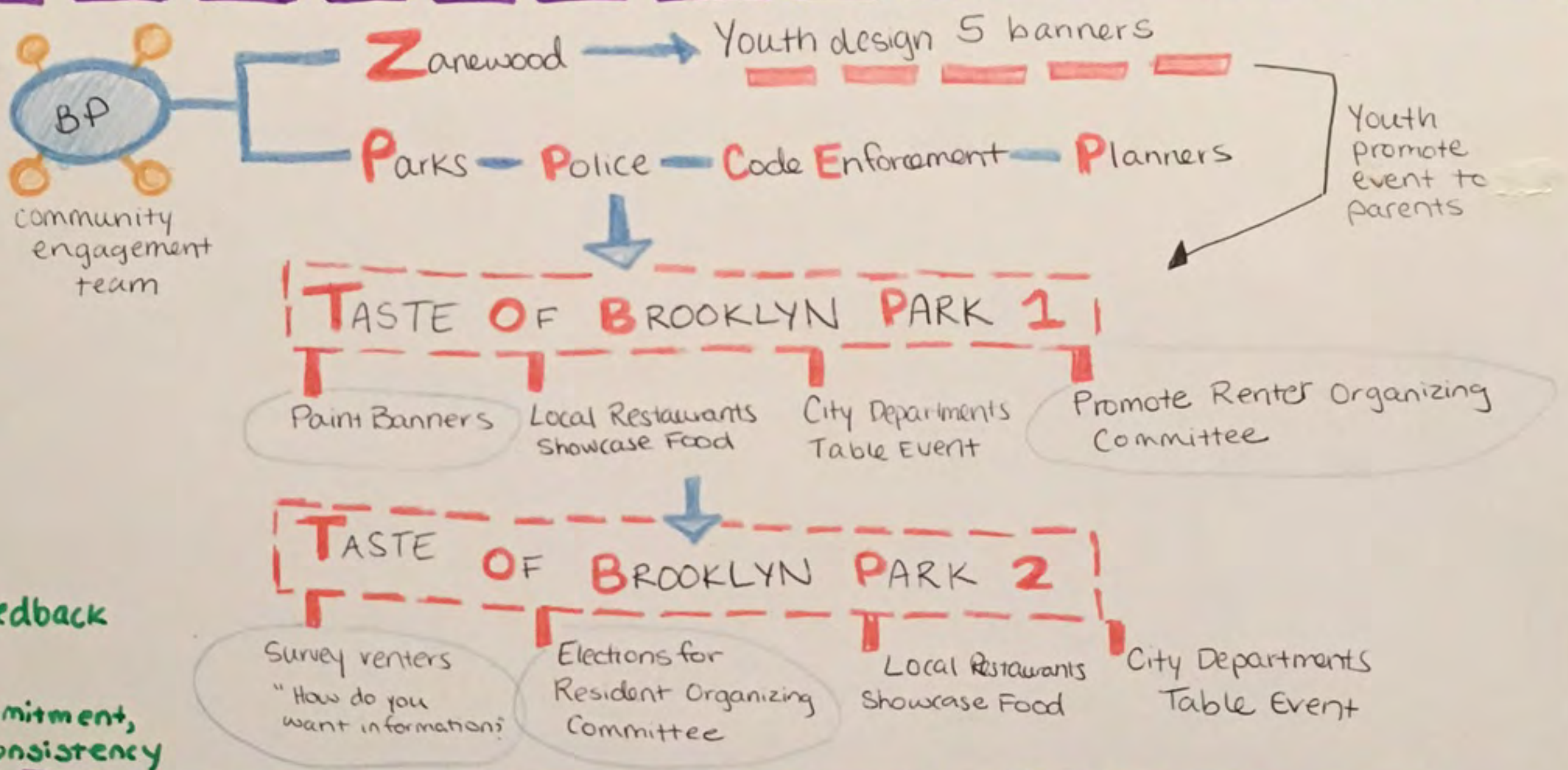
Step 2

2: SUMMER 2017

IAP2: CONSULT

City obtains public feedback and builds trust.

4 C's = caring, competence, commitment, consistency

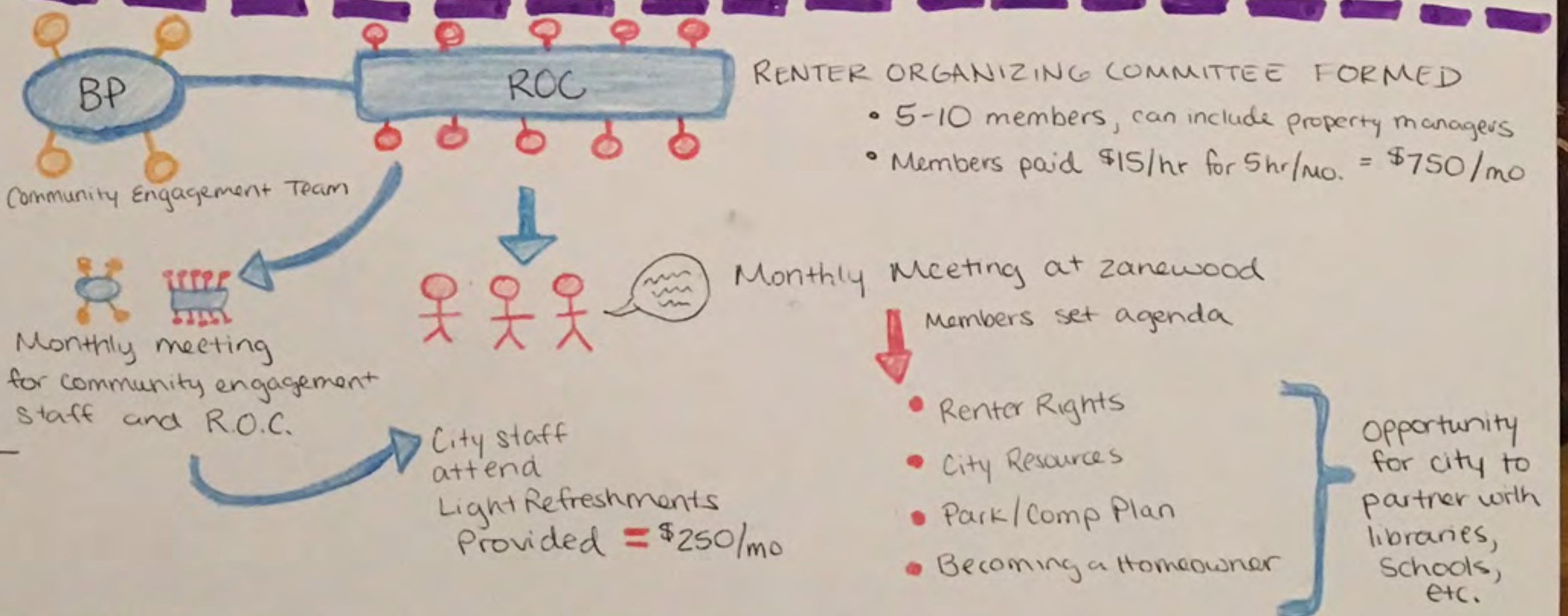


Step 3

3: SUMMER/FALL 2017

IAP2: INVOLVE and COLLABORATE

City partners with the public to understand concerns and identify solutions.

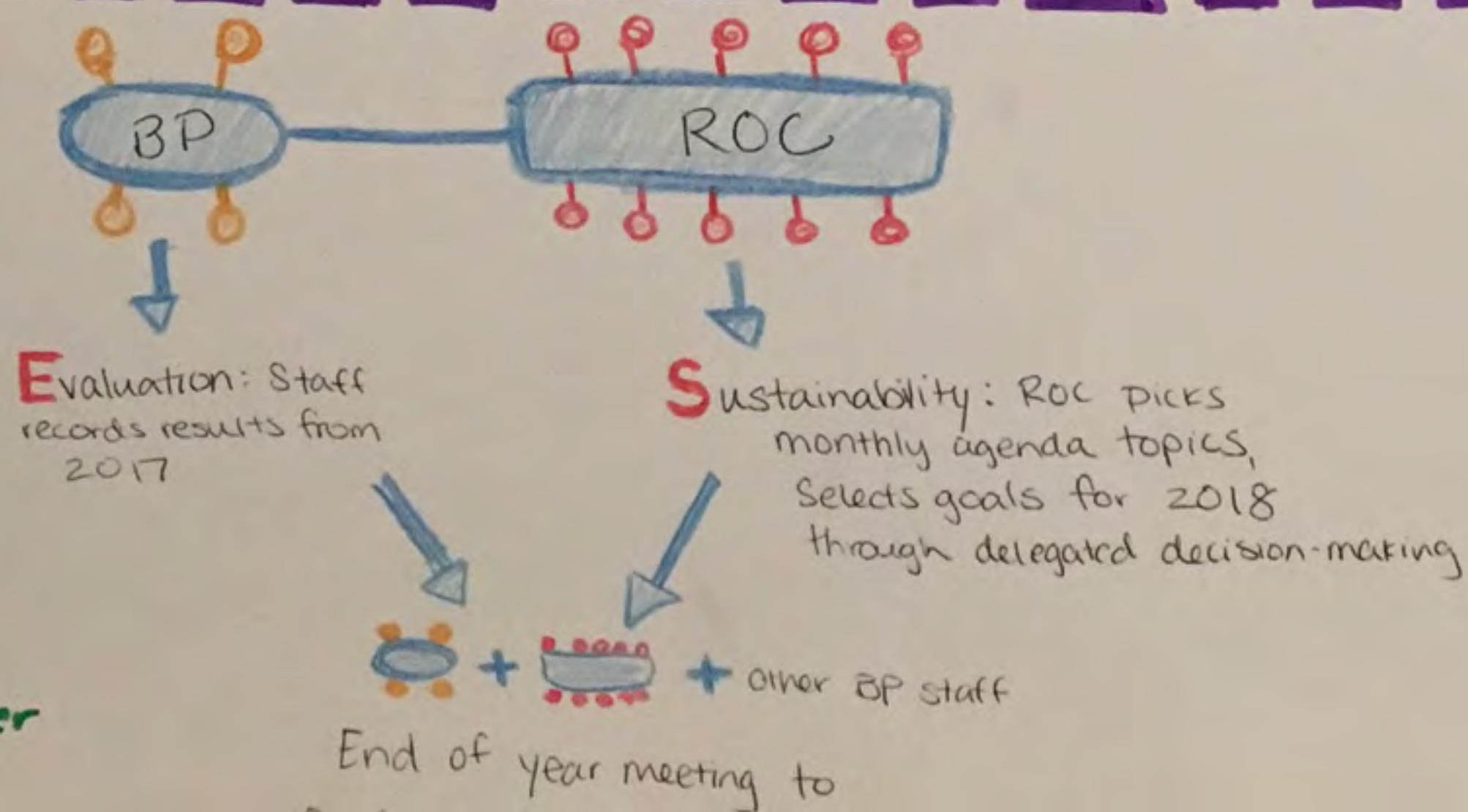


Step 4

4: WINTER 2017

IAP2: EMPOWER

Renter organizing Committee has direct power in decisions for 2018 planning.

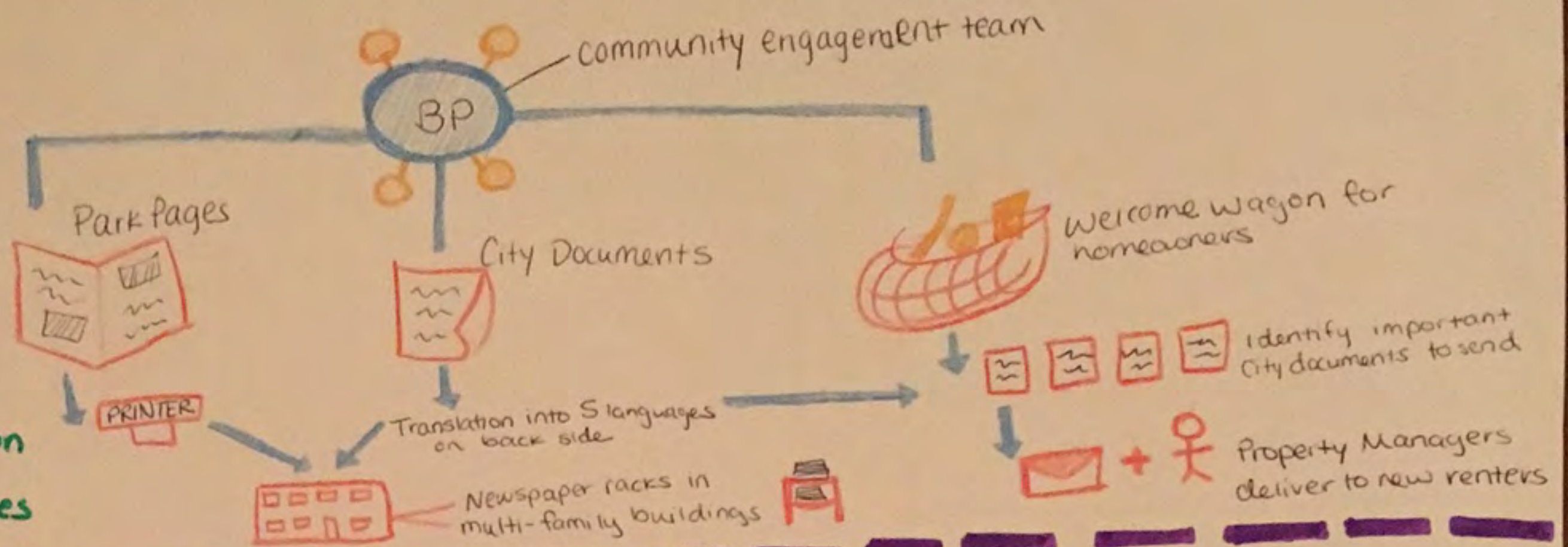


Building Renter Engagement in BROOKLYN PARK

Step 1: SPRING 2017

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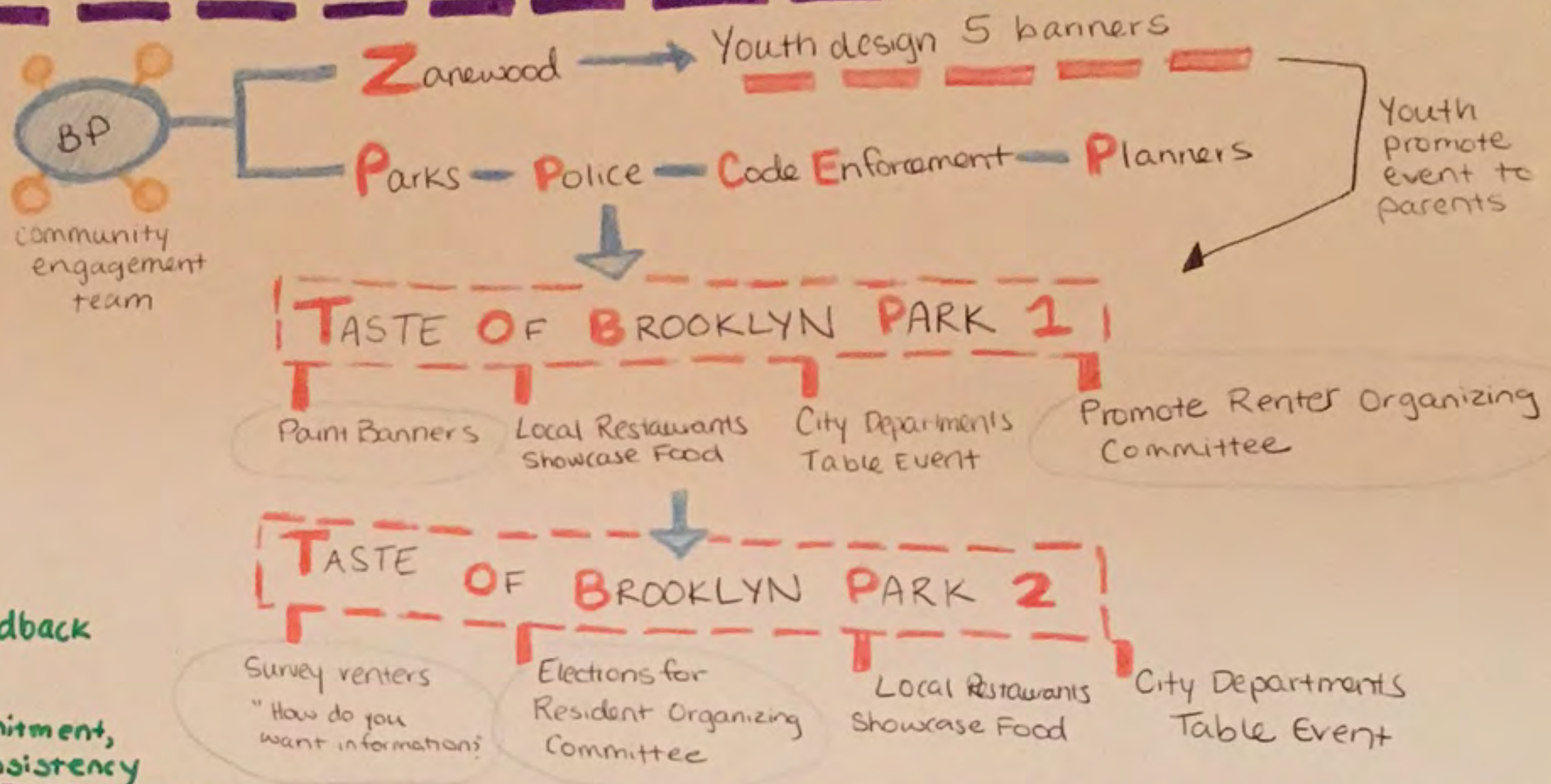


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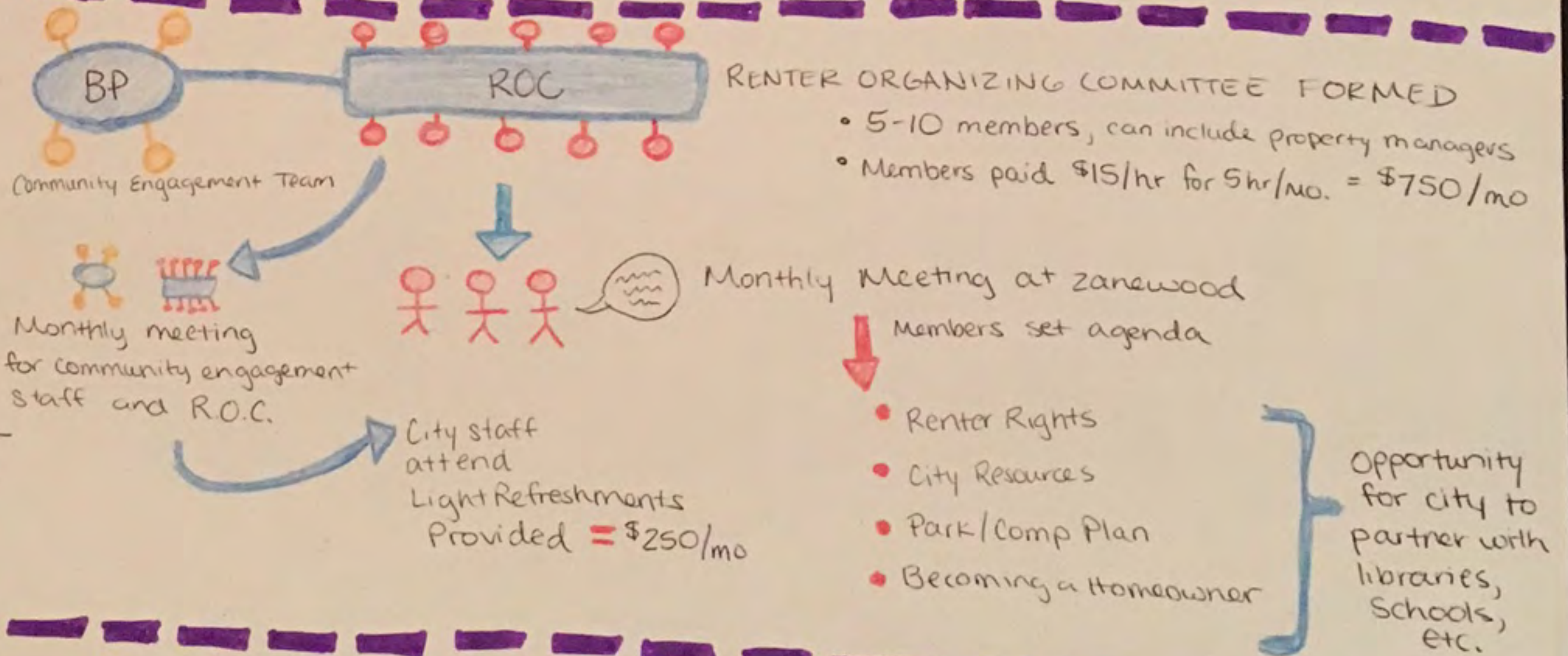
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