

# Every Voice Matters

## City of Ramsey Citizen Engagement Plan

### Current Engagement Summary

The City of Ramsey, Minnesota has been a regional leader in community engagement. This project creates a framework for future engagement in the city and provide recommendations for specific types of engagement. In 2006, Ramsey overhauled their engagement strategies. Ramsey3, as this plan was called paired innovative grassroots activities with traditional events and activities, but Ramsey knows it can do more. A biennial survey found that residents continue to feel that they have not been engaged on enough projects. The city has many tools that they could use to communicate and engage their community, however, the primary method to gather input continues to be meetings or tabling at events. These methods gather input, but only from the people who attend those events. In 2016, only 11% of residents reported attending a public meeting.

City of Ramsey staff is optimistic about the direction of engagement, while at the same time recognizing the gaps. The current community engagement surrounding the comprehensive plan is a great example of where the City of Ramsey is looking to take community engagement. This thoughtful and inclusive process seeks to integrate residents into the design and decision making process from the beginning.

Currently the city does very little tracking and evaluation of engagement practices. Anecdotally, city staff is able to identify strategies that have worked in the past but do not track and record data on these efforts. City staff has also identified a need for more continual and consistent engagement practices outside of large city projects and plans.



### Current Activities

#### Comprehensive Plan Engagement

A plan that defines the process to take community ideas and turn them into strategies to be included in the comprehensive plan. It can be generalized to three steps-- scoping meetings, develop ideas and solutions, and agree on preferred ideas and solutions. It is based primarily on public meetings, but supported through tables and information at other community events.

#### City Planning and Project Engagement

For smaller development, construction and road projects the City of Ramsey currently engages stakeholders through notifications and plan reviews. This process focuses on education and obtaining feedback on developed plans. City staff has identified this process as an area that needs improvements due to its lack of up front engagement and resident driven solutions.

#### Happy Days Festival

The Happy Days festival is an annual festival of the City of Ramsey. It is about families enjoying a day out and having a wonderful time on a variety of family-friendly activities and events. The city uses this event to engage with their residents through an informal booth highlighting upcoming projects and activities at the city. This event as a good opportunity to reach out and engage more residents.

#### Ramsey Resident Newsletter

Every other month the City of Ramsey puts together a newsletter called the Ramsey Resident. This newsletter is mailed to every resident and available online through the City of Ramsey archive database. It includes information about city services and events in the city. It has been identified as the #1 source of information on city events and government notices for residents of Ramsey.

#### Facebook and Social Media

Currently the City of Ramsey has a Facebook page but no other social media. City Staff maintains and updates the city Facebook page in conjunction with other online and print notifications/information. Currently Facebook is used solely as an information outlet with minimal attempt is made to facilitate conversations or prompt discussions.

#### Ramsey Business Outreach

The City of Ramsey puts on three main events to connect and engage with businesses in the community. The fall Economic Development Authority (EDA) breakfast, a summer golf/dinner event and the spring business expo. These events are intended to connect city staff with business leaders in the community and build engagement for upcoming projects in the city of Ramsey.

### Best Practices for Engagement

#### PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

##### The process form, type, and stakeholders



The most important step in designing an engagement process. The desired goal or purpose shapes the form of engagement, the selection of stakeholders, and the type of evaluation. This determines the types of questions to ask, what solutions are sought, who needs to be at the table, and other aspects of the process. Allows intentionality about designing engagement at different stages of the decision making process.

#### PROACTIVE, NOT REACTIVE

##### Create legitimacy and ownership



Engagement works best when it is proactive, not merely reactive. Building community engagement into the decision-making process at many stages provides legitimacy for the decisions made, as well as ensuring that relevant information makes it to the table. When residents are a part of the process, they feel ownership over it and their community. This sense of ownership then spurs more engagement.

#### TRANSPARENT AND ITERATIVE

##### How the process impacts decisions



Transparency is fundamental to trust building and to the legitimacy of any engagement process. Transparency includes being open about the purpose of an engagement activity. Making explicit the impact an engagement will have allows community members to feel more ownership over the process. Each step of engagement informs other aspects of the process. This is the iterative aspect of engagement.

#### GO TO THE COMMUNITY

##### Bring the meeting to the people



While council meetings and open houses may be necessary forms of engagement at times, they often lead to underrepresentation of certain demographic groups. Those people excluded from standard meeting formats are almost inevitably marginalized in some manner. Bringing the meeting to the people is the practice of bringing engagement efforts to events where community members are already present.

#### EQUITY

##### Addressing the gaps



Equity can be seen as concern over the distribution of resources, services, and opportunities. Equity is often discussed in the same breath as "diversity," but they are not the same. In community engagement, equity is a concern over which voices are included at the table. Sometimes equity is the goal, sometimes it is addressing the gaps by changing the time, location, or language of the engagement process.

#### EVALUATION

##### Did the engagement work?



Firm and measurable evaluation criteria are an indication that the engagement design actually does address the stated purpose; if during the design process the team struggles to identify measurable evaluation criteria, it is likely that either the purpose or some key stakeholder identification has not been fully developed. Evaluation criteria allows an assessment of the effectiveness of the engagement.

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### Recommendations



#### ASSESSING AND GROWING ENGAGEMENT OVER THE LONG-TERM

Fostering a culture of community engagement takes time, goal-setting, and a commitment to the long-term effort. Ramsey should establish a baseline for community engagement and set goals for the city. Nexus Community Partners developed a Community Engagement Assessment Tool which the city can use to assess current community engagement. Dimensions of engagement to consider include relationships with community members, the purpose of your engagement, how engagement is conducted, the manner in which ideas are generated and the extent to which the city's culture, policies, and structure support or detract from engagement. The city should complete the assessment every 3-6 months to measure progress and set new goals.



#### ENGAGING UNDERREPRESENTED GROUPS

The city should track participation and assess underrepresented groups. This practice may help the city to refine its understanding of which underrepresented groups need targeted engagement. A few potential groups that have been identified through Census data and conversations with city staff include English language learners, renters, teens and young adults, young families, and communities of color. Each of these groups will require a different approach to engagement. Strategies to engage these groups will be based on the location and timing of events as well as the activities and language of the events. To engage the entire community it is necessary to develop strategy to get participation from all groups in the city.



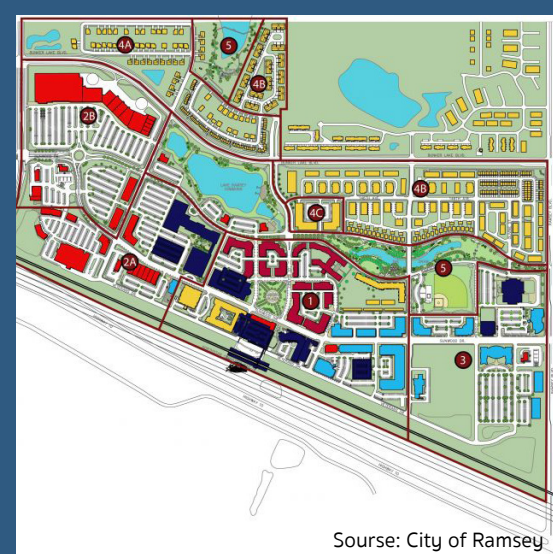
#### LEVERAGING COMMUNITY-WIDE EVENTS

Several existing community events draw a large number of residents. These include Happy Days, The Draw Summer Event Series, and the farmer's market. The city should increase their participation at these events to include not only communication of information but also community engagement activities, such as Sticky Note Boards, asset mapping, mini-surveys or other creative activities that produce brief engagement. The city may choose a theme for these engagements that aligns with the event (such as parks and recreation) or may use the opportunity to engage residents in a specific city project or concern. The city should also leverage this opportunity to share information learned in previous engagements on the topic and advertise upcoming engagements.



#### SMALL PROJECT ENGAEMENT/ROAD RECONSTRUCTION

When working on projects it is important to engage the community and get buy-in from residents early in the process. This is being done for the Ramsey's comprehensive plan, but it is important that this is done for smaller projects in the city such as road reconstruction projects. When final plans are presented to the community there will be more acceptance and understanding when residents are involved from the beginning. Engaging the community should start before plans are made and continue throughout the process. Having meeting in the community and use maps and other visual aids to describe the process. Once input has been gathered it is important that the information is used in creating the final plan.



#### COR MODEL

The COR development in Ramsey is only just beginning. The future design and land use within the COR will not only define the vibrancy of this district but the long term resilience of the city as a whole. Because of its importance, the ability to visualize and evaluate future developments in the COR will be essential in ensuring the best possible outcomes. A physical model of the COR will give residents of Ramsey a better idea of the current and potential design of the COR development. The model should grow with development and be able to have parts replaced as development occurs. Displayed in a prominent location, the model would be a constant engagement tool, educating the public and facilitating conversations around current and future plans.



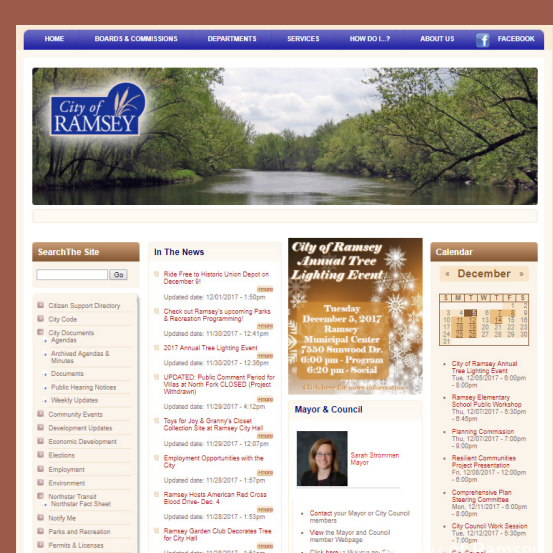
#### PLANNING ENGAGEMENT AND LESSON FROM THE 2040 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Ramsey should continue to build upon the success it has already had with engagement on the comprehensive plan, especially in regards to how residents were included in the design and decision making process from the very start. The city should continue to put residents at the forefront of design and decision making processes. The city should use new methods of engagement to continue discussion of topics identified in scoping meetings, such as the Place It! workshops or World Cafes. Additionally, the city should consider focusing their tracking on the three distinct purposes of engagement that were previously discussed - community building, education, and input/data gathering.



#### WELCOME PACKET

This packet currently includes information about city services, but it does little to connect new residents with the community. The welcome packet offers an opportunity to foster stronger connections between new residents and the community. A volunteer group, or an existing community organization could work to build these relationships. They could work to add information about civic organizations and community events, keep the information in the welcome packet current and create a more interesting and engaging layout. The welcome group can also create additional events to welcome new residents to Ramsey and, as always, these events could incorporate other more specific engagement exercises.



#### INFORMATION ACCESS AND USE OF CITY OF RAMSEY WEBSITE

The City of Ramsey is currently beginning the process of designing a new website. Through this process the city has a unique opportunity to not only modernize and update the website but make it functionally more accessible for residents. Currently city documents like council meetings, the 'weekly update' and other notices difficult to access. The future website should make current information the priority and provide the user with simple and upfront navigation that minimizes barriers to information and engagement with the city. The City of Ramsey should also use this opportunity to engage with the public on how they would like to access city documents and generally use the City of Ramsey's website.