NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL
**SPEAKER ADRIENNE E. ADAMS**

# Community Planning Framework

**MAY 2025**

NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL
**PLANNING AND LAND USE DIVISION**

SPEAKER
**ADRIENNE E. ADAMS**

This Community Planning Framework is dedicated to
Carlos Cariño-Higgins. Carlos' passion for public service and
engaging communities will continue to serve as inspiration to his City
Council colleagues as they honor his memory through this work.

# Letter From Speaker Adrienne E. Adams

New York City Council
**Speaker
Adrienne E. Adams**

Just over two years ago, I introduced a series of initiatives aimed at elevating the role of planning and centering community voices in the land use process. I released my Planning and Land Use Guidelines & Application Toolkit, rebranded the Land Use Division to the Planning and Land Use Division, and released my Housing Agenda. Collectively, these efforts sought to address the citywide planning challenges facing New York, such as the need to increase housing production, affordability, and equity, while also identifying ways in which projects can be shaped to better serve local community needs and priorities.

Since then, this Council has approved dozens of land use applications that will result in more than 30,000 projected new housing units, of which over 55% percent are affordable. As we have done the work of engaging with communities on these land use applications, we have seen that the Toolkit was just a start. However, the Council's land use process could benefit from more thorough strategies to meaningfully engage communities and secure better development outcomes for New Yorkers. Therefore, I am proud to release this Community Planning Framework, which builds upon the initial Toolkit.

This Community Planning Framework is meant to guide Council Members, city agencies, potential applicants, and community-based organizations as they embark on planning processes. It offers strategies for community engagement and proactive planning, and outlines methods to define collective goals and develop feasible community plans that will guide local development.

As Speaker of the New York City Council, I remain committed to improving processes in city government for the benefit of New Yorkers and securing the outcomes that New Yorkers need. We will continue to work with communities across the city to improve the planning and development process in order to address citywide challenges, including the housing crisis, while elevating the voices of all New Yorkers.

Sincerely,

*Adrienne Adams*

**Speaker** Adrienne E. Adams

Cover photos credit: Emil Cohen, 2024. NYC Council.

NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL | SPEAKER'S COMMUNITY PLANNING FRAMEWORK

# Table of Contents

## Community Planning Examples

# Introduction

Speaker Adrienne E. Adams aims to elevate the role of community planning in the land use process and proactively address community and citywide needs as outlined in the Planning and Land Use Guidelines and Application Toolkit, released by the New York City Council in December 2022.

This Community Planning Framework further focuses on community engagement and proactive planning. It is meant to guide Council Members, city agencies, potential applicants, and community-based organizations as they embark on planning processes, building on these core principles:

▶ Expand participation and input from diverse stakeholders at the neighborhood level.

▶ Balance local input with considerations of long-term citywide goals and needs that must be fairly addressed by all communities.

▶ Include diverse local stakeholders instead of limiting outreach to those who are most often empowered in traditional public engagement processes.

▶ Elevate the role of planning for communities and the entire city beyond specific projects and initiatives.

▶ Engage with local Council Members and stakeholders well before the start of the public review process to offer an opportunity for meaningful input.

▶ Conduct engagement through both traditional and non-traditional venues and outlets.

This Community Planning Framework begins by explaining the importance of planning as a practice that can help identify challenges, opportunities, and shared goals for the future of a neighborhood. It describes how thoughtful community engagement can advance development projects and neighborhood plans that respond to both immediate and long-term goals.

This Framework seeks to provide stakeholders with strategies for defining engagement goals and developing a feasible community planning strategy to guide local development. It provides examples of previous engagement processes, as well as a comprehensive menu of methods that can be referenced to create a customized engagement plan. It offers how to better consider different community planning approaches depending on established goals, resources, and timing of potential land use actions.

> **Whether a Council Member wants to take on an ambitious district planning process or if they have a particular ULURP application of a scale that warrants broader community planning conversations, this Community Planning Framework can be used to help guide the process.**

## About the Planning and Land Use Division (PLU)

The New York City Council's Planning and Land Use Division (PLU) is comprised of urban planners, land use attorneys, and legislative staff. In addition to staffing and facilitating hearings and votes at the Land Use Committee and associated subcommittees (the Subcommittee on Zoning and Franchises and the Subcommittee on Landmarks, Public Sitings, and Dispositions), PLU is also responsible for tracking land use applications as they move through public review processes, including the Uniform Land Use Review Procedure (ULURP).

PLU staff supports Council Members on land use applications, provides technical assistance on urban planning issues, and collaborates with Council Member offices to design and implement community planning efforts.

## About the Community Engagement Division (CED)

The Community Engagement Division (CED) of the New York City Council serves as a direct link between the Speaker's office, Council Members, and community and advocacy groups. CED is comprised of three units:

▶ **Community Outreach Unit (COU):** COU consists of liaisons, who are organizers with expertise in various fields. Their work aims to empower community members and connect them to government services.

▶ **Correspondence Unit:** The Correspondence Unit processes the mail that the Speaker receives as the head of the City Council and ensures that it gets responded to and/or shared with the appropriate staff and divisions.

▶ **Event and Production Services Unit:** The Event & Production Services Unit supports the Speaker and Council Members with services that include graphic design and paper materials production as well as City Hall Chamber event coordination and execution.

## Community Planning Resources
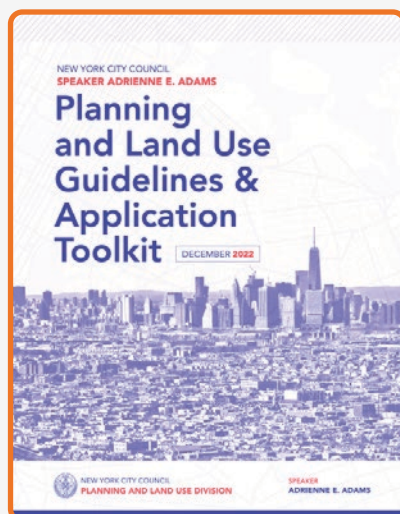


**Speaker Adams' Planning and Land Use Guidelines & Application Toolkit:** Provides extensive ideas for how to engage in responsive planning to improve land use applications in ways that balance citywide needs with local community goals and priorities.

**ANHD Land Use Toolkit:** A resource that discusses how community land use principles work, details how to use data resources to establish community need, and outlines how to create and apply community principles.

**NYC Dept. of City Planning Tools:** DCP offers a wide variety of free tools and open data such as: ZoLa, ZAP, Population FactFinder, and the Equitable Development Data Explorer.

# What Planning Can Achieve

Without planning, land use changes can often be unpredictable and piecemeal. Planning helps ensure that land use proposals are grounded in the long-term needs, perspectives, and visions of communities, the city, and the region. Elected officials, city agencies, prospective land use applicants, and community-based groups and organizations can build upon planning efforts to identify and communicate local priorities within the context of proposed land use actions.

*Community planning efforts can:*

▶ Elevate Community Engagement and Address Citywide Needs

▶ Advance Fair Housing and Increase Affordability

▶ Support Equitable Economic Development

▶ Adapt to Climate Change and Transition to Green Energy

▶ Improve Open Space and Streets for All New Yorkers

▶ Ensure Equitable Access to Healthcare, Education, and Essential Services

# When to Plan

Ideally, every neighborhood in New York City would have its own land use plan that is continually updated to balance local needs with citywide goals, guide equitable development, and garner community buy-in. But this is not typically the case. Planning across the city varies widely– some neighborhoods may have participated in a city-led or community planning exercise in recent years, while others have not done so for decades, if ever.

So, how can Council Members, prospective land use applicants, and community groups fill gaps to ensure land use proposals consider the needs of communities, especially when the timing of proposals is often unpredictable? There are two general approaches that will be discussed here: proactive planning and responsive planning.

**What is a land use applicant?**

Anyone applying to make a change to the existing rules for how land can be used, is called a "land use applicant" or simply, "applicant." In most cases, the applicants will work with the Department of City Planning to forge a path for their proposed changes, which often triggers ULURP. The City can also initiate proposed land use changes for a neighborhood or citywide.

# Proactive Planning

Proactive planning can come in many forms, and approaches can vary depending on who is doing the planning. The common thread that runs through nearly all proactive planning efforts is the identification of goals and strategies to guide the future development of a community, neighborhood, or city. Below are some examples of different ways stakeholders in New York City can engage in proactive planning.

▶ **Council Members** can work with PLU to develop a district plan that identifies long-term priorities, goals, and strategies at the district level to inform future development. District plans can help guide future land use decisions and help applicants and city agencies understand local priorities. This approach can help foster collaboration with city agencies as well as community stakeholders.

▶ **Community Boards (CBs)** prepare annual Community District Needs statements to establish funding priorities and inform neighborhood planning efforts and service delivery. CBs might develop additional plans that capture their priorities such as Manhattan Community Board 4's Affordable Housing Plan.

▶ **Developers and prospective land use applicants** can have enormous influence over the built form and development of a neighborhood, and therefore have opportunities to respond to community needs. In order to proactively plan, it is critical that developers and prospective applicants consider existing community plans and collaborate with community stakeholders when developing their proposals. When a project is still in preliminary planning stages, developers/property owners should do early outreach to the Council Member, the Community Board, and neighbors that live adjacent to a proposed project. This is an essential step towards ensuring a collaborative process that is proactive.

▶ **City agencies** use several proactive planning approaches. NYC's Department of City Planning (DCP) leads neighborhood-scale planning efforts that often lead to rezonings. The Department of Housing Preservation & Development (HPD) engages with local stakeholders to plan for the development of new affordable housing on city-owned sites through RFP processes and neighborhood studies. NYC Economic Development Corporation (EDC) also sometimes leads planning processes when considering initiatives to develop city-owned land. Other agencies such as the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), and School Construction Authority (SCA) publish capital planning strategies for maintaining and updating infrastructure throughout the city. The Gowanus Neighborhood Plan (DCP) and the Brownsville Plan (HPD) are two recent examples of proactive planning led by City agencies.

▶ **Organizations and research institutions** such as the Association for Neighborhood & Housing Development (ANHD), NYU Furman Center, and the Regional Plan Association (RPA) conduct research and data analyses to inform urban policy decisions and are often great data sources to understand existing conditions and policy options.

▶ **Community-led neighborhood plans** are a powerful way for residents and stakeholders to organize around needs and shared visions. These plans can help to advocate for and direct resources towards neighborhood goals. Groups may work with planning consultants to support these planning efforts or apply for grants such as the "Brownfield Opportunity Area" studies funded by New York State. 197-a plans are another important tool that Community Boards and other entities have to formalize a community planning effort. While 197-a plans have not been utilized as readily over the past twenty years, the City Charter mandates that the City Planning Commission respond to 197-a plans.

## PROACTIVE PLANNING EXAMPLE: COLLABORATE

# Atlantic Avenue Mixed-Use Plan (AAMUP)

**Scale:** Neighborhood Plan

**Resources:** 💲💲💲💲💲 HIGH

- ▶ Private Consultants
- ▶ City Council/DCP Partnership
- ▶ Inter-agency coordination
- ▶ Admin-sponsored



Photo credit: The Atlantic Avenue Mixed-Use Plan, 2023.

**Purpose/Goal:** Develop community priorities and recommendations for a plan to reimagine the Atlantic Avenue corridor from Vanderbilt to Nostrand Avenues in Brooklyn.

Building on proposals initially developed by Brooklyn Community Board 8, the Department of City Planning collaborated closely with Council Members Hudson and Ossé and consultant WXY Studios on an intensive six-month engagement process that resulted in a detailed Community Vision and Priorities Report that will shape the implementation of the Atlantic Avenue Mixed Use Plan and rezoning.

**Scope/Input Areas:**

- ▶ *Streetscape, Physical Infrastructure, and Open Space*
- ▶ *Economic Development, Human Capital, and Services*
- ▶ *Land Use, Density, and Housing*

**Outcome:** Community Vision and Priorities Report to guide a neighborhood rezoning implemented by DCP. Public review began in October 2024, about one year after the report was published, and the final plan was approved by the City Council in May 2025.

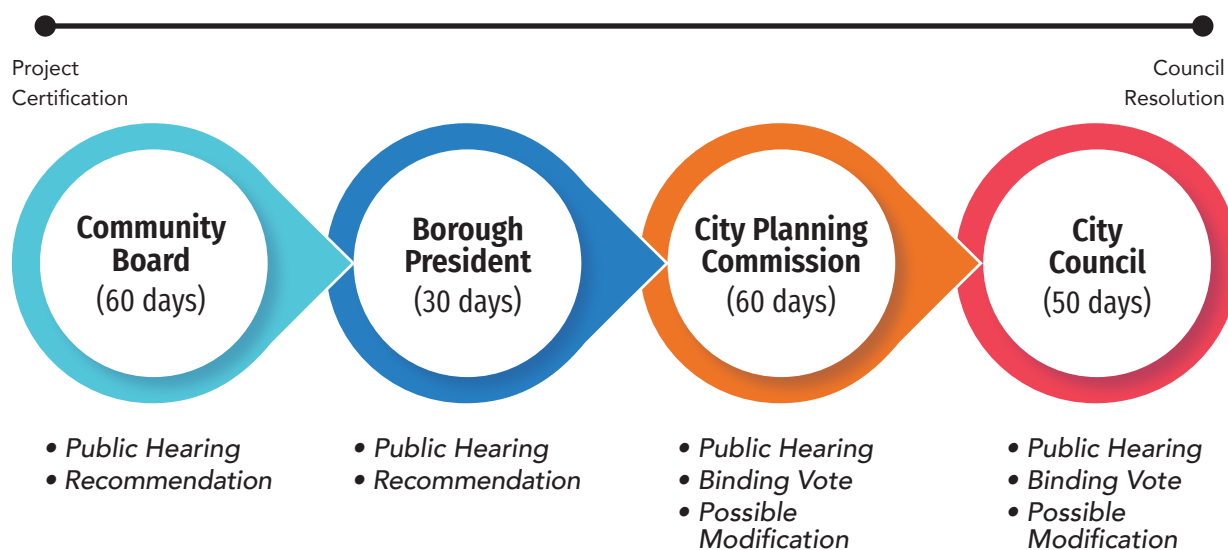## Atlantic Avenue Mixed Use Plan Timeline
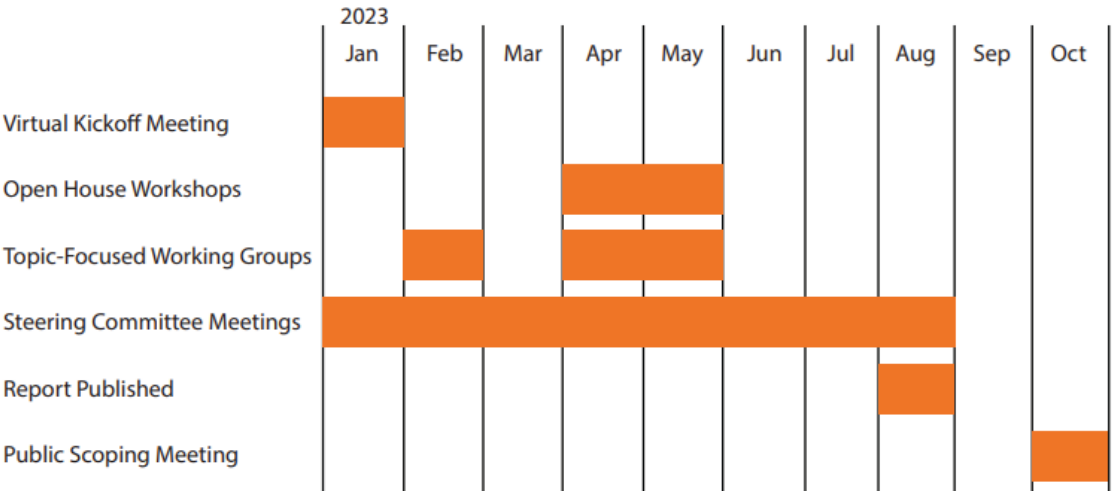
## Responsive Planning

In New York City, development and land use changes are largely regulated by zoning. The City Charter allows flexibility for potential applicants such as city agencies or private property owners to propose changes to land use regulations within a particular area. Applicants may seek to construct larger buildings or use properties differently than currently allowed by applying for changes to the zoning map and text.

The Uniform Land Use Review Procedure (ULURP) is the City Charter mandated public review process for most land use applications. Applicants, Community Boards, Borough Presidents, the City Planning Commission (CPC), and Council Members all play critical roles in ULURP.

### ULURP PROCESS AND ROLES

Project Certification

Council Resolution

**Community Board** (60 days)
- *Public Hearing*
- *Recommendation*

**Borough President** (30 days)
- *Public Hearing*
- *Recommendation*

**City Planning Commission** (60 days)
- *Public Hearing*
- *Binding Vote*
- *Possible Modification*

**City Council** (50 days)
- *Public Hearing*
- *Binding Vote*
- *Possible Modification*

Because of the established ULURP process, communities are often in more of a responsive position when engaging with land use proposals. While this may seem like a disadvantage, it is unavoidable and instead should be seen as an opportunity to advance appropriate community goals in an actual development project. Coupled with proactive efforts, responsive planning can lead to guided incremental growth.

When a land use application is anticipated, community engagement prior to and during ULURP can further shape the projects to better meet community goals. The responsive planning process for community engagement should happen early on in a project, ideally before certification, to allow for input that can be meaningfully incorporated. The Planning and Land Use Division (PLU) is available to help Council Members and applicants determine what is appropriate.

Speaker Adams' **Planning and Land Use Guidelines & Application Toolkit** provides a menu of ideas and strategies for responsive planning organized around six policy areas:

1. Local Engagement
2. Affordable Housing
3. Equitable Economic Development
4. Climate Change and Sustainability
5. Open Space and Urban Design
6. Community Services

# Building a Plan

Clearly defining the goals of a community engagement process is essential to ensure a focused and productive conversation. To begin planning, think about the following questions:

**The Council's Planning and Land Use Division is available to help Council Members get started with building a plan!**

▶ **Establish Values**
- What problems are we seeking to solve?
- Why is this process important for the community?
- What are the desired outcomes?

▶ **Set Goalposts**
- Which specific factors can/cannot be influenced?
- What are some ways to best manage expectations?
- What constraints can be identified?

▶ **Determine the Study Area**
- Is this a neighborhood, corridor, or private site?
- Where are the problem areas in the community?
- How broad should the impact of the recommendations be?

▶ **Identify Stakeholders**
- Who will be most impacted by this plan?
- Where do these individuals participate and engage?
- Are there active groups and organizers who care about the impacts of this effort?

▶ **Allocate Resources**
- Do applicant teams, Council staff, or community-based organizations have resources to assist?
- Are there local civic groups whose mission aligns with this work?
- Is there already a development team assembled who has resources to contribute?
- Is there a possibility for City agency partnerships?

▶ **Develop a Timeline**
- Are there deadlines to be considered?
- By when does this need to be completed to be effective?

▶ **Structure Conversations**
- What topic areas align with the goals of the plan?
- What topic areas can be influenced by this effort?

**Sample Topic Areas**
- Housing affordability and types
- Community services and facilities
- Commercial corridors and local economic and workforce development
- Types and mixtures of development (housing, retail, office, industrial, etc.)
- Transportation and street safety
- Green and open space
- Climate resiliency
- Healthcare
- Sites with plans or potential for new development

# Spectrum of Engagement

Once the important questions have been answered to get a planning process started, it's important to be thoughtful about the right scale of engagement. Thinking about a spectrum of engagement can help when considering how to engage stakeholders at the appropriate level of partnership based on desired outcomes and available resources. Different strategies can be adapted to various contexts depending on the specific land use application or district planning process (see Page 22 for the Menu of Engagement Strategies).

Ideally, planning processes and development projects should seek to engage stakeholders at each of the below levels, but that is not always feasible or even productive. It is important to respect the valuable time of all stakeholders and bring them in to the extent they want to be involved and can contribute to the effort. Deeper and broader engagement strategies may be warranted when there are ways stakeholders can influence a plan or project, and there is interest.

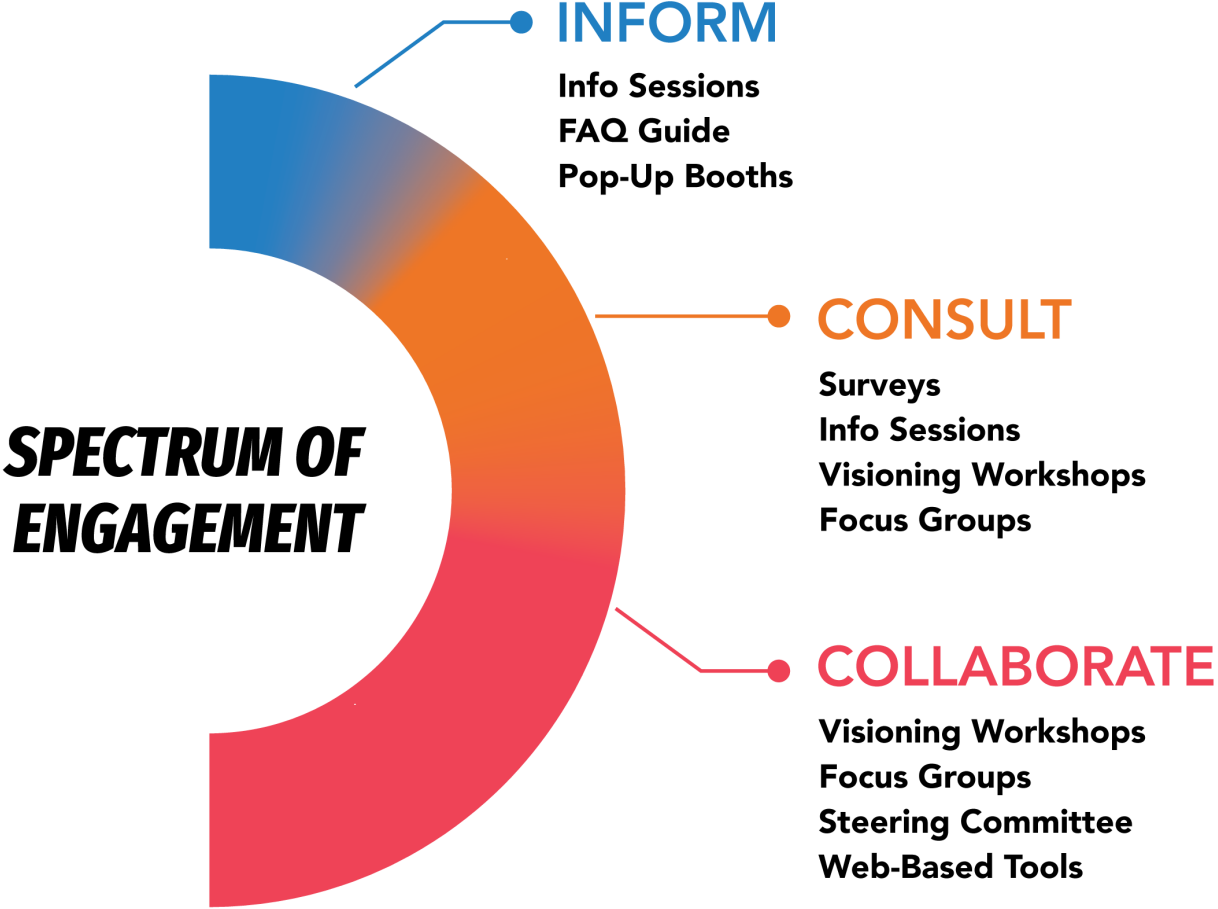## INFORM: Provide the community with the latest information

This level of engagement can live on its own or it can be used as a first step to kick off a longer district planning process. Info sessions, FAQ guides, and pop-up information booths are formats that are well-suited for providing the latest updates to communities about private applications or planning processes that will affect them.

## CONSULT: Seek and synthesize community input

This level of engagement can reach a large audience and gather broad input. Online surveys, visioning workshops, interactive web-tools, or public comment maps, and focus groups are formats that work well to advance that goal. Priorities and concerns expressed by the community are incorporated into deliverables that work well for consultation.

## COLLABORATE: Bring community stakeholders in as partners and leaders of the planning process
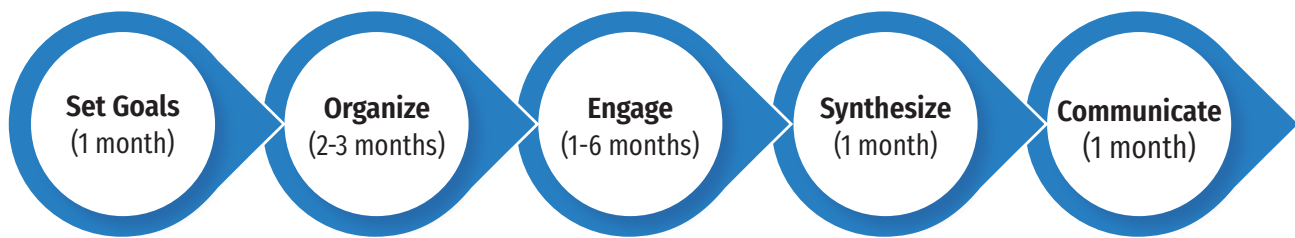
This level of engagement includes stakeholders as key partners in the engagement and planning process. Partnering with community stakeholders builds civic capacity and increases long-term accountability and oversight of the plan. Creating advisory committees or steering committees can be a very effective way to build trust and allow the broader community to play a more active role in developing engagement strategies and activities. The "Menu of Engagement Strategies" offers a range of strategies and engagement formats that can be organized and designed in partnership with the community.

# SPECTRUM OF ENGAGEMENT

## INFORM

**Info Sessions**
**FAQ Guide**
**Pop-Up Booths**

## CONSULT

**Surveys**
**Info Sessions**
**Visioning Workshops**
**Focus Groups**

## COLLABORATE

**Visioning Workshops**
**Focus Groups**
**Steering Committee**
**Web-Based Tools**

### Menu of Engagement Strategies

Refer to the Menu of Engagement Strategies on Page 23 to learn more about each strategy.

# Engagement Process + Timeline

| Set Goals (1 month) | Organize (2-3 months) | Engage (1-6 months) | Synthesize (1 month) | Communicate (1 month) |

## 1. Set Goals

In this stage, it is critical to think about desired goals and objectives, how the engagement will be used, and the boundaries of influence.

## 2. Organize

Determine staffing and resources, create an informed timeline, choose engagement strategies, identify neighborhood partners, and build out materials.

## 3. Engage

Once goals have been set, stakeholders have been organized, and the plan has been resourced, it's time to start engaging with community members. Regardless of where this planning process falls on the Spectrum of Engagement, and whether it's more of an in-depth proactive strategy or in response to a forthcoming land use proposal, flexibility will be crucial, as it may be necessary to refine materials and pivot as engagement is underway.

## 4. Synthesize

Synthesize and summarize conclusions. For engagement efforts with a longer timeline, discussions should be designed to start broadly and then get more specific over time in order to arrive at comprehensive conclusions. Summarize findings in communication materials.

## 5. Communicate

Communicate back to community members through emailing, online campaigns, and other methods to report back to the local groups who have attended meetings along the way.

> For engagement to be inclusive and reach affected and wider audiences, it's important to prioritze diverse modes and venues of communication, as well as accessibility (translation, closed-caption, etc.)

# Responsive Planning in Action: Land Use Application

Council Members are in a unique position to review and evaluate certain land use applications that come to the Council for approval. Depending on timing and available resources, Council Members can consult with PLU and CED to facilitate input and stakeholder coordination through an engagement process, even if the opportunity to more proactively engage in a more robust district planning process is not feasible.

*How can community engagement help with evaluating land use applications?*

▶ Additional community input gives the applicant the opportunity to adjust a project (when possible) to better meet the needs of community members.

▶ When local stakeholders are brought into the process early (especially before ULURP), input can be especially helpful to vet changes to the proposal before it's too late.

▶ Community input can inform specific recommendations and direction for a Council Member's negotiations with the applicant and modifications during ULURP (if modifications are possible).

▶ Community advocacy and engagement can add accountability to ensure certain commitments are met.

> Council Members should work with PLU to determine how certain land use proposals can be modified to better serve local needs and interests. Sometimes desirable modifications are not "in scope" meaning that they are outside of the parameters of what is allowed to be changed through the ULURP process. Planners and attorneys at PLU are available to provide guidance on modifications that are "in scope."
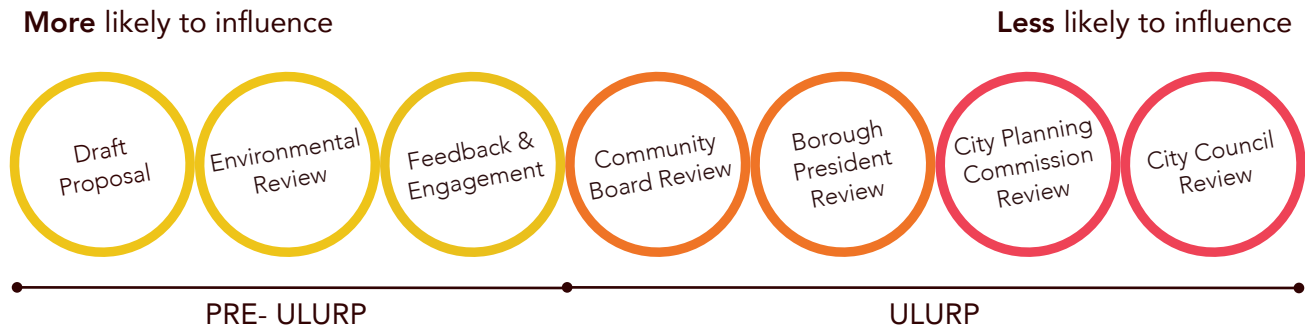
*Timing*

The best time to engage the community is before the project certifies and begins ULURP, or even earlier, before certain environmental review milestones such as the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) public scoping hearing (if one is needed). This is known as the ULURP pre-certification phase and can take several years.

Early engagement allows potential applicants to submit a proposal that is more responsive to community preferences, and for community and elected representatives to use the feedback to reinforce desired project components. Waiting until after the environmental study is determined or after the start of public review can narrow the opportunities for public input to shape what is ultimately built.

The ULURP process begins when a land use application is certified. Applications are reviewed by Community Boards, Borough Presidents, sometimes Borough Boards, the City Planning Commission, and then the City Council.

# Opportunities to Influence a ULURP Proposal

**More** likely to influence                                    **Less** likely to influence



| Draft Proposal | Environmental Review | Feedback & Engagement | Community Board Review | Borough President Review | City Planning Commission Review | City Council Review |

PRE- ULURP                                  ULURP

*Timeline*
~3-6 month engagement process including planning

*Goals of Engagement*
The scope of the engagement should match the scope of the application. For example, if this application is for a site that doesn't allow for retail uses, the goals of engagement shouldn't be to understand retail needs. If Mandatory Inclusionary Housing (MIH) will be mapped, engagement around which MIH option to choose is relevant. The height of a building is sometimes a contentious subject, however, allowable changes to height and density during ULURP can sometimes be constrained by "scope." PLU is always available to advise Council Members on what parts of a land use application can be influenced.

*Resources*
Resources needed might include staff to design engagement strategies, create materials, and facilitate virtual and in-person events. Additional support is often required to make engagement inclusive, such as translation/interpretation services, childcare, and food/drink.

**THINGS TO THINK ABOUT:**

- Staff time and skill set
- Graphic design and material creation
- Translation services
- Online venue
- Accessible in-person venue
- Physical print outs and workshop material
- Marketing and information dissemination
- Community partnerships to support input and marketing of events

*Depth of Engagement*
Depending on the scale of the proposal and the applicant, engagement on individual land use applications is often informative and less in depth. Collaborating with engaged local stakeholders can help empower both advocates and Council Members to achieve community goals together. The level of engagement should be right-sized to realistically respond to what is possible to achieve.

## ULURP applications

Community Board and Borough President submissions on ULURP applications are only recommendations. While they are not binding votes that can stop a project from advancing, their recommendations offer direction to the City Planning Commission and City Council. The City Planning Commission and City Council vote on a ULURP application, the actions are binding, and a vote to "disapprove" can stop a project from moving forward. Each level of review must be completed within specific timeframes, as mandated by the City Charter.

# Parkchester Visioning Workshop

**Scale:** Two ULURP applications along the same corridor (part of a neighborhood rezoning)

**Resources:** $ $ $ $ $ LOW

- ▶ CED and PLU for event staffing, materials and activity design
- ▶ Development teams provided renderings and 3D model
- ▶ Local orgs helped with translation

**Purpose/Goal:** DCP had hosted a series of community events regarding the larger Bronx Metro North Area Study (BMNS) from 2018-2021, and the Council and Bronx Borough President Vanessa L. Gibson conducted additional community engagement in Fall 2023 (as depicted in the timeline below). The Parkchester Visioning Workshop was held to collect additional feedback regarding two separate proposals for new mixed-use development coming to Parkchester as part of the larger BMNS rezoning sponsored by DCP.



Photo credit: Emil Cohen. 2024. NYC Council.

**Scope/Input Areas:**

- *Transportation*
- *Housing Affordability and Unit Types*
- *Commercial Needs*

**Outcome:** This workshop educated community members about development trade-offs, which resulted in clear feedback about their values and priorities. PLU and CED compiled the feedback into a concise document that helped guide conversations between the Council Member and development teams during the ULURP process.

## Bronx Metro North Area Study Fall 2023 Engagement Timeline
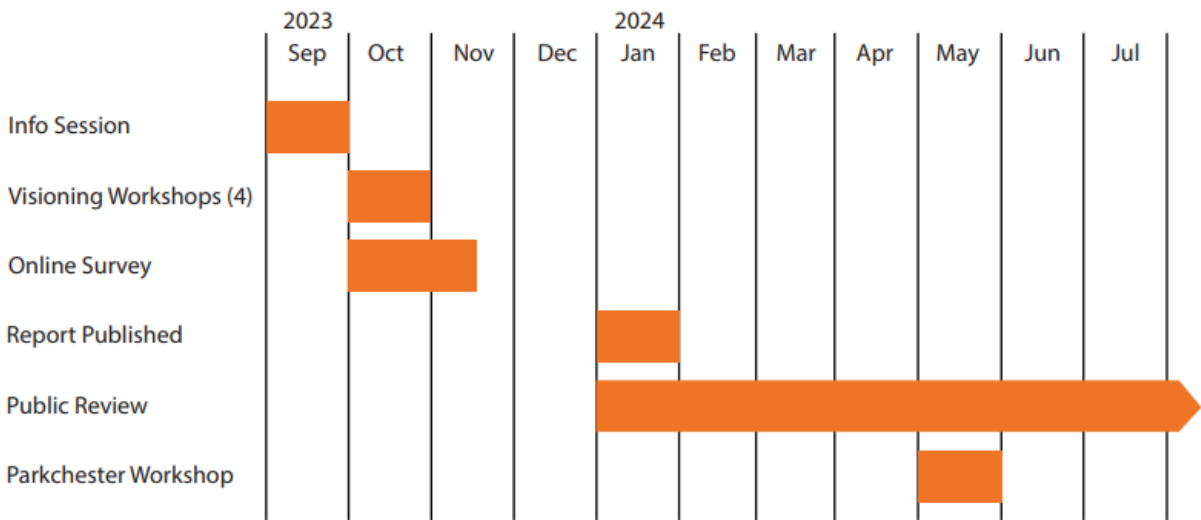
## Proactive Planning in Action: District Plan

A district plan or neighborhood plan can serve as a powerful tool for neighborhood stakeholders to inform planning priorities and growth in a broad geographical area. It is a district-based vision developed with technical assistance from planning and land use experts that provides a strategy for proactive planning through a process that engages residents and stakeholders in meaningful conversations about the future of their neighborhood.

Components of a district plan may include existing conditions analyses, identification of community needs and priorities, priority capital improvements, policy and programmatic recommendations, and the foundation of a zoning and land use framework. This document can also be used to inform a Council Member's decisions on land use, housing, and other planning policies. It can be useful both in reviewing incoming private applications to determine if they are aligned with community goals and priorities, and in advocating for potential agency-led neighborhood planning.

*How can district plans help serve communities in the land use process?*

▶ A guiding document can be developed for advocacy and decision making around planning and land use proposals. This type of document can be especially useful if an area of a district is experiencing a high flow of private ULURP applications.

▶ Working with community stakeholders to develop shared neighborhood priorities makes for better long-term planning and more impactful responses to land use applications.

▶ Increased community buy-in for proactive planning can help strengthen the local civic participation muscle.

▶ Potential opportunities for new strategic partnerships and coordinated planning efforts can be identified.

▶ District plans can serve as the foundation for larger planning efforts that can bring city resources to communities.

*Timing*

Creating a district plan can be done at any time. To get the most out of the process, it would be best to undertake early to mid-term. It also pairs well prior or in tandem with large-scale private rezonings or neighborhood rezoning plans.

*Timeline*

~1-2 years

*Goals of engagement*

Analyses of existing conditions will inform an initial assessment of strengths, weaknesses, challenges, and opportunities. This first phase of research is used to structure the community planning goals and neighborhood priorities that will inform a district plan. The engagement ultimately identifies shared goals and principles, highlighting the key opportunities in land use, housing, and other planning topics areas. District plans might include identified opportunities for developing affordable housing, recommendations to update long outdated zoning that is constraining the types of development the community wants to see, ideas for addressing infrastructure needs, environmental justice, health equity, public safety, and other planning goals.

## Resources

Staff capacity is a major factor to consider when developing a community engagement process. District plans tend to be resource-intensive, as they require staff with certain skill sets to undertake analyses, create materials, facilitate community conversations, and ultimately output recommendations. Regardless of who is organizing the engagement efforts, there is often opportunity to bring in stakeholders such as community-based organizations, or other city agencies and development teams, to contribute to the tasks.

## Depth of Engagement

District planning provides an opportunity for collaborative thinking about the needs of a neighborhood. The process itself is an opportunity to build the civic engagement capacity of community members and help them develop planning and land use knowledge.

The planning process will often begin with engaging civic organizations as partners. Community collaboration, with continuous feedback loops, is a critical part of the process. It may be good to form committees to help guide the process, build deeper buy-in, and encourage long-term accountability. There should be at least two rounds of public engagement and information synthesizing at this level.

For example:

- **Public Engagement (Round 1):** After gathering sufficient research and data about existing conditions in the study area, that research should be presented to the public. This is the moment where local stakeholders can help identify key challenges and opportunities, providing a narrative that can either confirm the existing conditions research or identify gaps and areas that require further study.

- **Public Engagement (Round 2):** A draft district plan is presented to the public for feedback. Members of the public can provide input on the content areas previously outlined, which may include a high-level land use framework, strategies for affordable housing development and preservation, open space/public realm improvements, economic and workforce development opportunities, and community facilities among others.

  There can be multiple rounds of engagement depending on the scope of the plan. More intensive plans will often involve a larger series of meetings that build upon community feedback and embrace an iterative process.

### Things to Think About

- Zoning, land use, and urban design technical skills and expertise
- Graphic design and flyer creation
- Survey creation, dissemination, analysis
- Workshop facilitation
- Outreach material design and production
- Staffing public meetings
- Illustrations/models of big-opportunity sites
- Maintain web page
- Maintain a feedback loop with participants
- Translation services
- Create floor plan and run of show for public meetings
- Document engagement efforts and compile summary reports
- Steering Committee maintenance

## PROACTIVE PLANNING EXAMPLE: COLLABORATE

# East Harlem Neighborhood Plan

**Scale:** Neighborhood Plan

**Resources:** $ $ $ $ $ HIGH

▶ Private consultants (x2)

▶ Full-time staff (Council)

▶ City Resources

▶ Community Partnerships

▶ Volunteers

▶ Admin-sponsored

This planning process involved resources and coordination between several city agencies and the Council. This example is most relevant for those interested in embarking on an intense and comprehensive engagement process (9 months – 1 year) inclusive of a strong role for a Steering Committee.
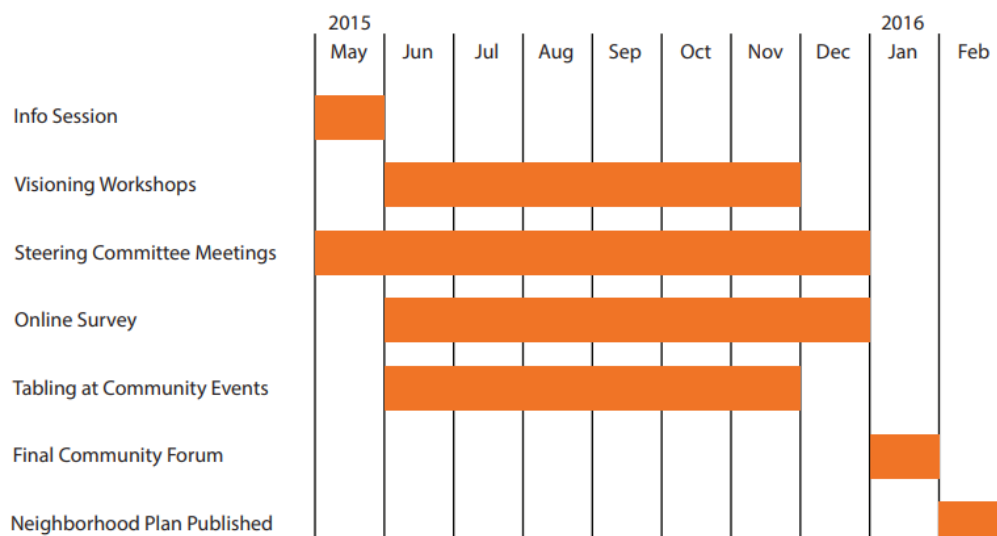
**Purpose/Goal:** To proactively outline the priorities of existing residents to inform a City-led neighborhood rezoning proposal.

## Input Areas

• *Arts & Culture*

• *Open Space & Recreation*

• *Schools & Education*

• *Pre-K, Daycare, & Afterschool*

• *NYCHA*

• *Housing Preservation*

• *Small Businesses, Workforce & Economic Development*

• *Affordable Housing Development*

• *Zoning & Land Use*

• *Transportation, Environment, & Energy*

• *Safety*

• *Health & Seniors*

**Outcome:** East Harlem Neighborhood Plan document that informed DCP's neighborhood rezoning proposal and commitment package. The plan included a call to action to guide stakeholders towards implementation of the plan's recommendations.

## East Harlem Neighborhood Plan Engagement Timeline

| | 2015 May | Jun | Jul | Aug | Sep | Oct | Nov | Dec | 2016 Jan | Feb |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Info Session | ■ | | | | | | | | | |
| Visioning Workshops | | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| Steering Committee Meetings | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | | |
| Online Survey | | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| Tabling at Community Events | | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| Final Community Forum | | | | | | | | | ■ | |
| Neighborhood Plan Published | | | | | | | | | | ■ |

## PROACTIVE PLANNING EXAMPLE: CONSULT

# Planning Together for Our Future: Council District 35

**Scale:** Council District-level

**Resources:** $ $ $ $ $ MODERATE

▶ Private consultants (Hester Street)

▶ Council staff

▶ Community partnerships



Photo credit: Planning Together for Our Future: District 35 Workshop Slides. 2024.

**Purpose:** To inform future development proposals in Council District 35 that fulfill the long-term needs or aspirations of community members. This example is most relevant for Council Members who want to identify community goals and priorities to inform development proposals by City agencies or private developers.

**Process/Timeline:** 7 months

**Scope/Input Areas:**

• *Housing*

• *Public space and infrastructure*

• *Youth and education*

• *Health and older adults*

• *Small business, arts, and culture*

• *Land use and zoning*

**Outcome:** A development framework to inform community goals and priorities for Council District 35. Council Members, city agencies, developers can use this type of framework as a proactive planning tool to assess how development proposals could align with community priorities.
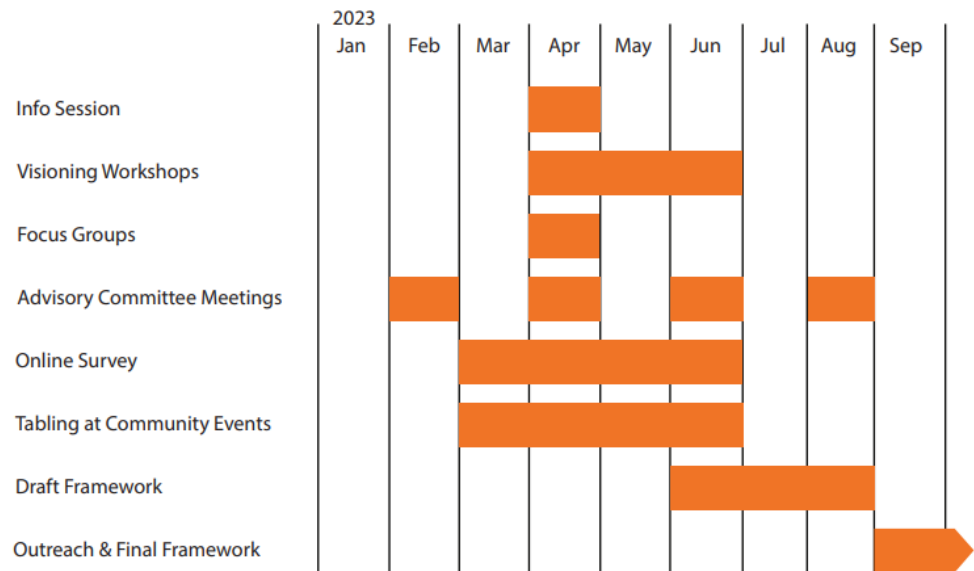
## Council District 35 Engagement Timeline

# Inclusive Community Planning Tips

## *MEET PEOPLE WHERE THEY ARE*

- There are several obstacles that prevent those who are interested in attending community engagement events from participating. Hosting engagement events and distributing outreach materials in the communities they are meant to reach is crucial.
    - Host events at convenient locations, at times convenient to community members, and in languages that community members speak.
    - Attend already scheduled community meetings, table at public community events, create materials that can be left at libraries, schools, and other community centers.
    - Distribute flyers or surveys at bus stops, train stations, public plazas, or other high foot-traffic locations.
- For in-person events, providing translation services, food, and childcare are steps that can be taken to lower the barrier to entry and make it easier for the public to attend.
- Translate technical jargon and acronyms into everyday language. Communication materials and activities should be accessible to those without any background in land use or zoning.
- Create a comfortable environment. Consider both ADA accessibility and the physical needs of different groups.

## *BE CURIOUS*

- Relax initial assumptions and ask questions instead. People use storytelling to help convey their values, so be sure not to dismiss personal anecdotes.
- Do not take it personally if someone is skeptical, critical, or angry. Planning discussions can stir up strong feelings. Acknowledge the experience of others by summarizing their main points when responding to them. This makes people feel heard and diffuses potentially disruptive conversations.

## *BUILD TRUST*

- Transparency and accountability are an essential part of the engagement process. Participants should have a clear sense of how their input will be used. Maintain a feedback loop with event attendees to keep them aware of future engagement opportunities, feedback summaries, and/or survey results.

## *COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT EVENTS SHOULD BE FUN*

- Use game mechanisms in designing engagement activities. Games make conflict more playful than antagonistic and foster an environment where problems can be addressed collaboratively. Games also have clear rules and indicators to measure progress. This approach can take some of the weight off fraught topics like affordable housing by making them more approachable.

# Menu of Engagement Strategies

There are endless ways to build a community engagement plan. The following is a non-exhaustive list of strategies that can support established community planning goals. Think about what ways stakeholders will most likely participate, what resources are available, and which strategies will foster productive conversations to develop recommendations that will achieve the established community planning goals.

> The Planning and Land Use Division and the Community Engagement Division are always available to help Council Members identify the best strategies to achieve identified goals.

## Info Sessions

An information session is a presentation given to the public to provide the latest facts about a policy, planning study, or proposal. This format can include a Q&A portion and is often followed by a series of more involved or collaborative engagement events.

**SIMILAR STRATEGIES:**
Open House
Virtual Info-session

**PAIRS WELL WITH:**
Web Page
Visualizations
FAQ Guide

**RESOURCE INTENSITY:**
$ $ $ $



Photo credit: NYC Dept. of Housing Preservation & Development, 2023. Nevins and Third Open House.

### Advantages:

▶ Kicking off an engagement series, or touch-points for updates

▶ Reaching a large audience

▶ Gauging community concerns or support

▶ Light interaction with constituents

▶ Building a sense of transparency

▶ Can be recorded for those unable to attend

### To consider:

• Community is sometimes not as satisfied with this format unless they have an opportunity to unmute and ask questions directly

• Limited personal interaction and subject to technical issues

# Open Houses

An open house allows members of the public to drop in on a rolling basis to learn about and/or comment on a study or proposal. One typical layout of an open house is to have a series of presentation boards, activities, and/or city agencies tabling with informational materials.



Photo credit: Dana Leventhal. 2023. NYC Council.

**SIMILAR STRATEGIES:**
Pop-ups
Workshops

**PAIRS WELL WITH:**
Visualizations
Table & Map Activities

**RESOURCE INTENSITY:**
$ $ $ $

## Advantages:

▶ This format is flexible and allows a varying range of capacity for the public to provide feedback.

▶ Opportunity for holistic engagement if staff across multiple agencies and/or multiple levels of government attend

▶ A relatively spontaneous and informal engagement format, which makes it suitable for a first-time audience

## To consider:

• Not for detailed information sharing and discussion

• There is a potential for bottlenecks at certain stations. The physical space needs to be laid out in a way that encourages people to circulate around the room.

# Surveys

A questionnaire to collect feedback from the community. Gathering testimony from survey responses is a great way to supplement quantitative data with qualitative comments.
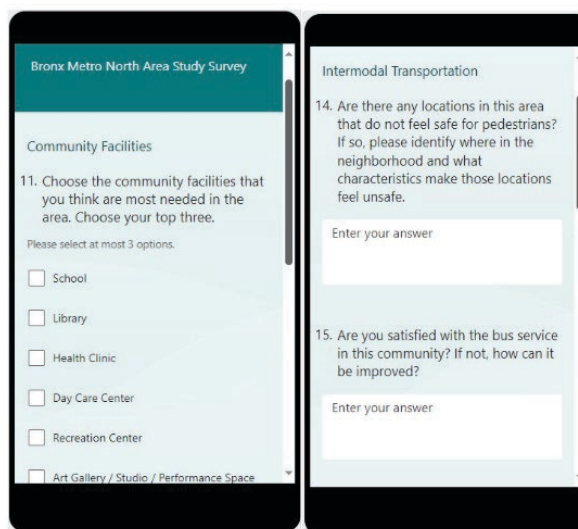


**SIMILAR STRATEGIES:**
Interactive Map

**PAIRS WELL WITH:**
Workshops
Pop-ups

**RESOURCE INTENSITY:**
$ $ $ $

## Advantages:

▶ Quantitative input

▶ Can capture a lot of people with both virtual and in person options

▶ Feedback can be collected quickly

▶ Can be combined easily with other engagement formats in person such as tabling, etc.

▶ Easy and flexible way to gather feedback

## To consider:

• Some questions require assistance with interpretation or clarification

• With a lot of exposure, there is a risk of capturing an unintended or unrepresentative population

315 Powers Avenue Story Map

Submitted Comments

We want to hear from you!
Tell us about the neighborhood by adding a comment on the map. Comment on the map to tell us about places that can connect to your vision for the sites and/or places you think are essential for understanding the area.

- St. Mary's Park! Love the dog park :)
- Love the restaurants on Alexander-- we need more sit down places
- St. Mary's Park!
- Abandoned lot at 150th street & Wale's Ave (595 Wales Ave)
- More support for people who want to become homeowners
- More opportunities for outdoor vendors by providing dedicated areas
- Very heavy traffic.
- NYC Parks community center is in a great location.
- Would like to see the vacant lot and building become mixed use commercial and residential.
- Should be more high density residential near the E 143rd St subway station. Commercial ground floor along Southern Blvd.
- The right of way should be maintained despite sections built on north of E 149th St. Maybe a greenway for the remaining portion? Maybe storm water storage? Maybe both?
- Not happy about the jail, it should be located near the courts on E 161st. Could have used the Concourse Village shop's parking lot.
- Would love to see this jail closed and a high density mixed use development here.
- Burger King and Autozone on parking lots like in the suburbs. Would love to see this redeveloped.

*Image credit: NYC Dept. of Housing Preservation & Development. 2024.*

## SIMILAR STRATEGIES:
Post-it Activity with same questions

## PAIRS WELL WITH:
Web Page
Online Survey

## RESOURCE INTENSITY:
$ $ $ $

# Public Comment Maps

This is an online tool where participants can drop location pins on a map and submit comments about that location.

### Advantages:

▶ Especially helpful for collecting location-specific feedback

▶ High level categories such as:
  - I love this in my neighborhood
  - I have an idea for this location
  - I do not like this

▶ Comments collected on a rolling basis

▶ Inclusive of demographics with varying schedules

▶ Comments can be easily compiled, coded, and analyzed

### To consider:

• Limited personal interaction

• Subject to access to programs and technology

# Tabling / Pop-ups

Tabling at public events or other locations with high foot traffic is an informal way to bring informational materials and surveys out to the community.



Photo credit: Dana Leventhal, 2023. NYC Council.

**SIMILAR STRATEGIES:**
Open House

**PAIRS WELL WITH:**
Surveys
Public Input Maps
Visualizations

**RESOURCE INTENSITY:**
$ $ $ $

## Advantages:

▶ Meet the community where they are

▶ Opportunity to engage with underrepresented populations and those less civically engaged

▶ Engage hard to reach populations

▶ More personal one-on-one interactions with the community

▶ Tap into a new network of stakeholders with the help of a community partner or host site

▶ Opportunity to distribute surveys

## To consider:

● More personal interactions build trust with the community but can be more difficult to document, compile, and analyze anecdotal feedback

● Given the spontaneous nature of this format, short activities or surveys are more effective than activities that are more time consuming. Note that the Office of the Council Member would identify the community partners and events

# Site Visits and "Walkshops"

Site visits and walkshops are like a neighborhood tour where members of the public can visit proposed development sites or corridors to better understand where potential land use changes could occur.

**SIMILAR STRATEGIES:**
Virtual Walk

**PAIRS WELL WITH:**
Public Engagement Map
Surveys

**RESOURCE INTENSITY:**
$ $ $ $


Photo credit: NYC Dept. of City Planning, 2024, via Instagram.

## Advantages

▶ Orients people to the neighborhood and on-the-ground experience in a way that renderings cannot

▶ Highlighting specific physical features that would benefit from land use changes or streetscape amenities

▶ Especially helpful for large ULURP proposals and corridor-specific district plans

## To consider:

• More effective with smaller groups

• May need to host a series or add walk leaders

• Subject to weather conditions

• Cannot be recorded, unlike a virtual meeting

• Can be challenging for older individuals or those with limited mobility

**SIMILAR STRATEGIES:**
Site Visits
Walkshops
Workshops

**PAIRS WELL WITH:**
Info Sessions
Workshops
Events

**RESOURCE INTENSITY:**
$ $ $ $

# Virtual Tours

This is an online tool using 3D renderings or videos to virtually explore a neighborhood and/or a proposed development. This can help identify challenges and opportunities relevant to the pedestrian experience, public safety issues, building design, and more.

## Advantages:

▶ This format can help community members and stakeholders visualize exactly how a proposed development will look and feel in their neighborhood and how it will affect the public realm

▶ Creates an immersive experience. Helps to orient participants who have trouble orienting themselves on a map

▶ Can navigate through the existing neighborhood and also navigate through renderings of the proposed development

## To consider:

• 3D rendering and creating a user-friendly online tool costs money and requires skill set and time to build

Photo credit: NYC Dept. of City Planning, 2024.

**SIMILAR STRATEGIES:**
Workshops
Site Visits

**PAIRS WELL WITH:**
Surveys

**RESOURCE INTENSITY:**
$ $ $ $

# Focus Groups

Key stakeholders are gathered to discuss a specific issue area or topic; soft introduction of ideas to key stakeholders

## Advantages:

▶ Discussions with key stakeholders can inform how issues are discussed in larger visioning workshops

▶ Helpful for introducing a new policy or planning proposal or when approval from specific stakeholders is needed before moving forward

▶ Focus area group discussions can supplement quantitative data or survey responses

## To consider:

• Requires trained facilitators to guide the conversation with targeted questions

# Visioning Workshops

Visioning workshops are large public meetings that collect feedback through facilitated conversations, activities and/or games. Activities are structured around identified issue areas (housing, jobs, open space, etc.). A series of workshops can be scheduled over the course of several months and cumulatively build on community input.

**SIMILAR STRATEGIES:**

Focus Groups
Surveys

**PAIRS WELL WITH:**

Surveys
Interactive Maps

**RESOURCE INTENSITY:**

$ $ $ $



Photo credit: Emil Cohen. 2024. NYC Council.

## Advantages:

▶ This format provides an opportunity for participants to express concerns that would otherwise not be captured by quantitative data and/or surveys

▶ Opportunity for holistic engagement if staff across multiple agencies and/or multiple levels of government attend

▶ Opportunity for collective problem solving Participants can interact with and engage with each other

## To consider:

• Requires trained facilitators to guide the conversation with targeted questions

• Resource intensive: takes time to design activities and coordinate across multiple electeds/agencies

# Design Charettes

A design charette brings together policy and design experts and stakeholders to discuss designs and ideas. These are highly interactive and focus on zooming in from the big picture and engaging in details of the spaces. Input here is specific to design, density, uses and are best for single sites or public spaces.

**SIMILAR STRATEGIES:**
Walkshops
Sight Visits

**PAIRS WELL WITH:**
Visioning Workshops
Surveys

**RESOURCE INTENSITY:**
$ $ $ $



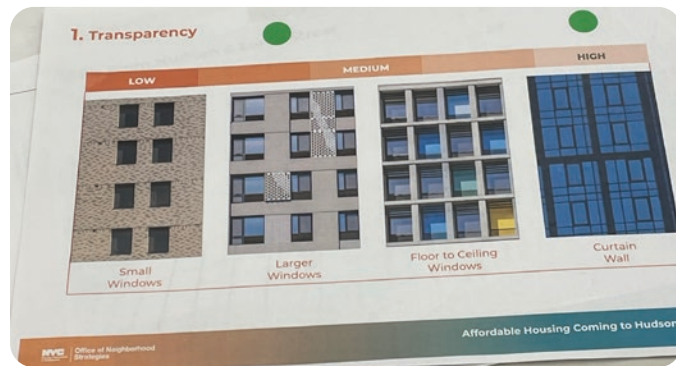Photo credit: Dana Leventhal. 2023. NYC Council.

## Advantages:

▶ Best suited for public workshops after visions and goals have already been set

▶ Detailed input on site plans

▶ Workshopping use and design options

## To consider:

• Must train table facilitators well

• Input areas should be meaningful

• Bigger picture items should already be addressed before diving into details

# Town Halls

A town hall is a public meeting where the public can express their opinions, ask questions, and engage in a dialogue about their top priorities or challenges. This is a transparent way for electeds to include the public in a community conversation.

**SIMILAR STRATEGIES:**
Open House
Info Session

**PAIRS WELL WITH:**
FAQs
Surveys
Interactive Maps

**RESOURCE INTENSITY:**
$ $ $ $



Photo credit: John McCarten. 2018. NYC Council.

## Advantages:

▶ Builds credibility with community members by being present, listening, and responding to questions

## To consider:

• Can sometimes be difficult for facilitators or elected officials to moderate and guide the conversation

Photo credit: East Harlem Neighborhood Plan, 2016. via flickr.

**PAIRS WELL WITH:**

Engagement
Strategy Prep
& Output Review

**RESOURCE INTENSITY:**

$ $ $ $

# Advisory/Steering Committees

Advisory Committees and Steering Committees are groups of experts or on-the-ground stakeholders who can inform the engagement process by providing an inside perspective, and give input to the synthesized outputs along the way.

## Advantages:

▶ Increasing stakeholder engagement and ownership

▶ Making sure a broad audience is being reached through member networks and insights into popular spots and events to plug into

▶ Strengthening the feedback loop between community stakeholders and the planning process

▶ Members provide project support, can resolve issues, and help with decision making

▶ Building long-term accountability and oversight

## To consider:

• Think carefully about how often to schedule meetings to avoid "meeting fatigue"

• Be prepared to respond to criticism

• Need to maintain an open line of communication throughout the engagement process and provide regular status updates to the Steering Committee

• Send over materials for review at least 48 hours before meetings to allow for more productive meeting discussions and feedback

# Interactive Websites

Interactive web platforms such as CoUrbanize or Neighborland can function as a central, publicly accessible location where members of the public can add comments or concerns to draft proposals or renderings.

**SIMILAR STRATEGIES:**

Webpage

**PAIRS WELL WITH:**

Surveys
Interactive Maps
Recorded sessions

**RESOURCE INTENSITY:**

$ $ $ $

## Advantages:

▶ Large scale proposals and district plans

▶ Customizable web templates can accommodate as much information as members of the public need access to

▶ Some web platforms can generate data reports summarizing community sentiments and statistics about how people are interacting with the website

▶ The public can submit their comments online on a rolling basis

▶ Can include language translation tools for a more equitable engagement process

## To consider:

• Lack of face time with community members

• Should be supplemental to in-person engagement strategies

• Public web pages might capture a larger audience than intended

• Fees associated with platforms

# Social Media, Listservs, and Mass Texting Platforms

**SIMILAR STRATEGIES:**
Webpage

**PAIRS WELL WITH:**
Surveys
Interactive Maps
Recorded sessions

**RESOURCE INTENSITY:**
$ $ $ $

These platforms are essential for reaching diverse audiences quickly and fostering real-time communication in an accessible format.

## Advantages:

▶ Keeps the public updated

▶ Simple messaging such as spreading the word about how to stay informed, upcoming engagement opportunities, meeting details, event flyers, links to more information, etc.

▶ Creates a feedback loop to let the public know how their feedback or comments will be used to inform the planning process

▶ Opportunity to capture new audience through boosted posts

▶ Email listservs and mass texting platforms can reach those who are not active on social media

## To consider:

● Social media posts might capture a larger audience than intended

● Social media posts should be supplemental to physical outreach materials

● Online messaging should be in simple language that is easy to translate

● Social media posts are not a substitute for in-person events and materials

# End Notes

1. New York City Council. Planning and Land Use Guidelines and Application Toolkit. December 2022. Available at https://council.nyc.gov/wpcontent/ uploads/2022/12/Speaker-Land_Use_Guidelines_Report-121522.pdf

2. Department of City Planning. The Atlantic Avenue Mixed-Use Plan: Community Vision and Priorities. August 2023. Available at Community Vision and Priorities - August 2023.

3. International Association for Public Participation. Spectrum of Public Participation. Available at https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.iap2.org/resource/resmgr/pillars/iap2_spectrum _2024.pdf

4. East Harlem Neighborhood Plan. February 2016. Available at https://eastharlemplan.nyc/EHNP

5. New York City Council. District 35 Land Use Framework. 2023. Available at https://council.nyc.gov/crystal-hudson/planning/

# Social Media, Listservs, and Mass Texting Platforms

**SIMILAR STRATEGIES:**
Webpage

**PAIRS WELL WITH:**
Surveys
Interactive Maps
Recorded sessions

**RESOURCE INTENSITY:**
$ $ $ $

These platforms are essential for reaching diverse audiences quickly and fostering real-time communication in an accessible format.

## Advantages:

▶ Keeps the public updated

▶ Simple messaging such as spreading the word about how to stay informed, upcoming engagement opportunities, meeting details, event flyers, links to more information, etc.

▶ Creates a feedback loop to let the public know how their feedback or comments will be used to inform the planning process

▶ Opportunity to capture new audience through boosted posts

▶ Email listservs and mass texting platforms can reach those who are not active on social media

## To consider:

• Social media posts might capture a larger audience than intended

• Social media posts should be supplemental to physical outreach materials

• Online messaging should be in simple language that is easy to translate

• Social media posts are not a substitute for in-person events and materials

# End Notes

[1] New York City Council. Planning and Land Use Guidelines and Application Toolkit. December 2022. Available at https://council.nyc.gov/wpcontent/ uploads/2022/12/Speaker-Land_Use_Guidelines_Report-121522.pdf

[2] Department of City Planning. The Atlantic Avenue Mixed-Use Plan: Community Vision and Priorities. August 2023. Available at Community Vision and Priorities - August 2023.

[3] International Association for Public Participation. Spectrum of Public Participation. Available at https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.iap2.org/resource/resmgr/pillars/iap2_spectrum _2024.pdf

[4] East Harlem Neighborhood Plan. February 2016. Available at https://eastharlemplan.nyc/EHNP

[5] New York City Council. District 35 Land Use Framework. 2023. Available at https://council.nyc.gov/crystal-hudson/wpcontent/uploads/sites/117/2024/04/Development-Framework-for-District- 35.pdf