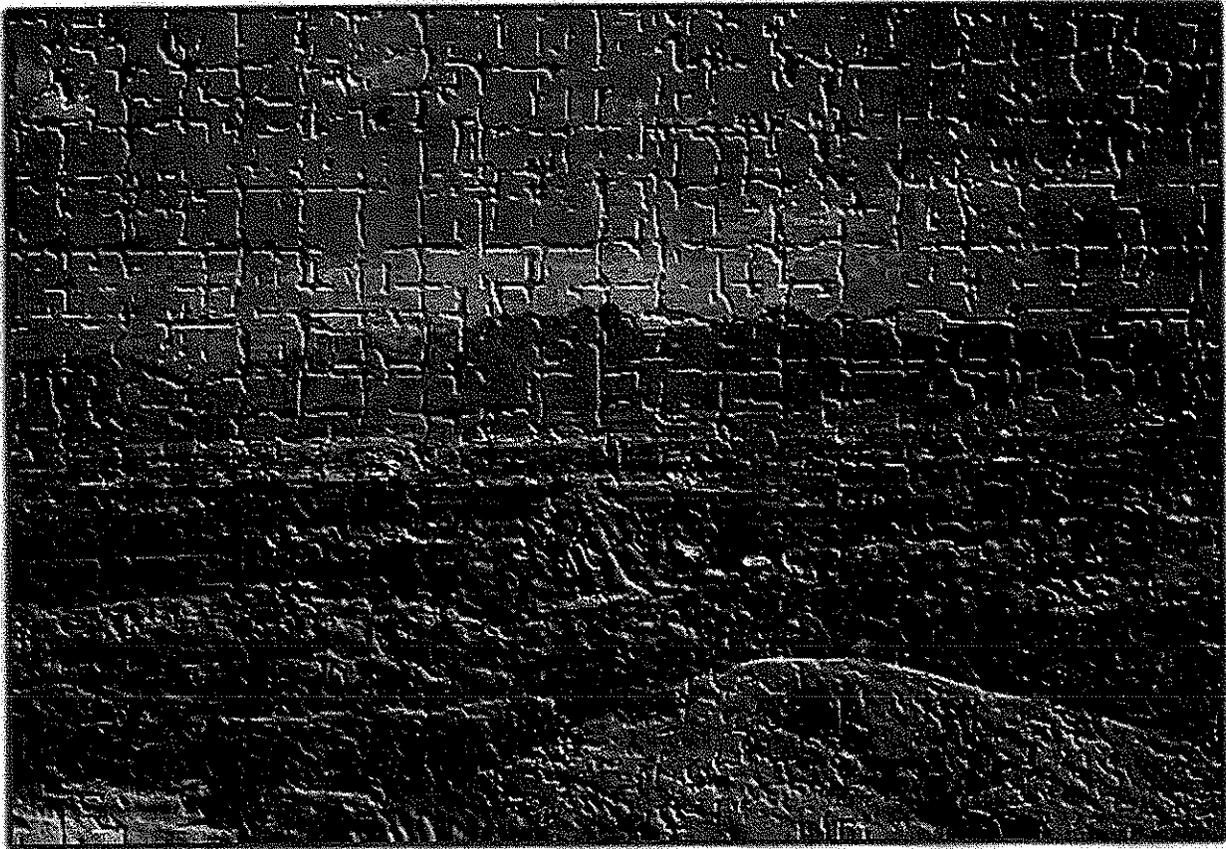


City of Las Cruces[®]

Public Notification and Participation Report and Analysis of Options for a More Informed Community



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Purpose

This report is intended to examine and analyze the various issues, methodologies and strategies regarding public notification and resulting participation that are in play within the existing City organizational structure and also within other agencies across the region. Ultimately, this effort will focus on the production of a set of "best practices" geared toward efficiently and effectively notifying, and as a result, soliciting participation and input from the general public regarding affairs of municipal government. Such an effort promises to achieve a more informed community on matters that span the spectrum of City sponsored activities often focused on general informational meetings, land use planning, proposed development, infrastructure improvements, and community-wide activities/events that ultimately create some degree of impact on City residents. The outcome of this effort and ultimate implementation of recommended practices is intended to be used by the City organization as a whole and not solely one or two individual departments.

Background

For several years, the City of Las Cruces has actively sought the distribution of information to its residents in hopes of obtaining their input and insight into various municipal activities believed to have some impact and/or benefit to the community. In fact, it is not only the position of this City to engage its citizenry, but also one shared by other communities and State and Federal levels of government. Since the City derives much of its authority from enabling legislation through the State of New Mexico, so to must the City at minimum, follow and regulate notification procedures in accordance to those provided via State Statutes. These standards for the notification of the community are the minimum standards that municipalities must meet or exceed.

It is important to note the manner of notification that State Law mandates of municipalities. Table 1 illustrates these standards presently in place for the processes/activities listed. Where the table identifies "None", the State Statutes are silent as to the requirements that apply to the stated action. Other processes/activities like holding a general public information meeting not rising to the level of requiring a quorum of appointed board, commission or council members, establishing law or policy, or otherwise carrying out official governmental action or business other than to inform and solicit input from citizens were not identified within the statutes and thus, do not have any specific notice requirements. As a result these activities are not recognized in Table 1, but are still discussed as part of this report.

From a development code perspective, notification procedures have been used albeit not in the same manner or fashion as they are presently applied since the adoption of the 1930 Las Cruces Zoning Code. At that time, newspaper notification and compliance with *Section 5 of Chapter 27 of the New Mexico Session Laws of 1927* governed all related proceedings. In fact, in consideration of previous codes, the same provisions in use today are quite similar to those in use since adoption of the 1969 Las Cruces Zoning Code; the code that regulated all things development at that time.

Standards used as of the writing of this report, have been the very same processes in use since the adoption of the 1981 Las Cruces Zoning Code, as amended, the 1991 Las Cruces Subdivision Code, as amended, and adoption of the 1989 Extra-Territorial Subdivision Code, as amended. Since adoption of these codes, discussions have ensued over possible modifications to notification efforts, but to date, no amendment to these standards have been made. It should be noted however, that some notification experimentation has taken place. Circumstances surrounding these attempts will be discussed later. Table 1 also identifies the standards in use by the City today. These standards exceed those minimum requirements established by State Statute in almost every area State Statutes speak to and as evidenced by Table 1, address other activities that typically involve public participation and input. In every case, the standards established by the Open Meetings Act are met through the applicable requirements.

Table 1: State and CLC Minimum Notification Standards Comparison

Action	Subdivision		Zoning		Entity		Variance		Plans		Code Amend.	
	State	CLC	State	CLC	State	CLC	State	CLC	State	CLC	State	CLC
Agenda Posting	Reasonable, defined by body	6 days prior to hearing	Reasonable, defined by body	6 days prior to hearing	Reasonable, defined by body	6 days prior to hearing	No reference	6 days prior to hearing	No reference	6 days prior to hearing	No reference	6 days prior to hearing
Mail Notification Timing	5 days prior to hearing	9 days prior to hearing	No reference	10 days prior to hearing	No reference	10 days prior to hearing	No reference	10 days prior to hearing	No reference	10 days prior to hearing	No reference	10 days prior to hearing
Mail Distance	No reference	200' excl. ROW; 300' NA	100' excluding ROW	200' excl. ROW; 300' NA	No reference	200' excl. ROW; 300' NA	No reference	200' excl. ROW; 300' NA	No reference	200' excl. ROW for Neigh. Plan; None for comp. plan	No reference	No reference
Mailed Parties	Applicant - Owner of Sub	Property Owners W/I dist.; NA	Property owners W/I distance	Property Owners W/I dist.; NA	No reference	Property Owners W/I dist.; NA	No reference	Property Owners W/I dist.; NA	No reference	Property Owners W/I dist.; NA	No reference	No reference
Newspaper Publication	No reference	9 days prior to hearing	15 days prior to hearing	15 days prior to hearing	No reference	15 days prior to hearing	No reference	15 days prior to hearing	15 days prior to hearing	15 days prior to hearing	2 weeks publication of title	15 days prior to P&Z. City Clerk process CC.
Sign Posting	No reference	9 days prior to hearing	No reference	10 days prior to hearing	No reference	10 days prior to hearing	No reference	10 days prior to hearing	No reference	10 days prior to hearing	No reference	No reference
Sign Size	No reference	No reference; Use 18"X24"	No reference	No reference; Use 18"X24"	No reference	No reference; Use 18"X24"	No reference	No reference; Use 18"X24"	No reference	No reference	No reference	No reference
Sign Location	No reference	Conspicuous locations	No reference	Conspicuous locations	No reference	Conspicuous locations	No reference	Conspicuous locations	No reference	No reference	No reference	No reference
Other/Misc.	Regular mail	1st Class	1 block or < certified mail; > 1 block, 1st class mail	Min. 15 unique property owners; 1st class P&Z, cert. CC	No reference	Min. 15 unique property owners; 1st class P&Z, cert. CC	No reference	Min. 15 unique property owners; 1st class P&Z, cert. CC	Refers to Comp. Plan creation	1st class P&Z, cert. CC	Actions that do not amend zoning map	Assumes general code amendment

Other types of activities not identified on these tables such as Councilor held District meetings, general informational meetings, and issue specific meetings wherein information is either collected or distributed by elected official or City staff yet where no official action or decision will be generated have no set State mandated criteria to follow. These activities tend to utilize a variety of differing notification strategies singularly or in tandem such as newspaper ads, first class mailings, postcard mailings, radio spots such as those announced for community events, email distribution, utility bill insert/mailer, neighborhood association notification, door to door flyer placement as well as others.

In that no single notification method is an absolute guarantee of "getting the word out," over the past several years, the City, mainly through its Community Development Department has attempted to test other means of notification as an opportunity to not only solicit comment from a broader cross section of persons, but to also generate greater participation in projects and programs. Staff has sought out notification options that are different from the normal processes and through that message, communicate and demonstrate to the public that participation is a large part of what staff may need to better understand project approach, key issues and obtain general consensus of related issues both large and small.

The following examples demonstrate new methodologies used in the notification of various stakeholders. Each attempt, while beginning with the initial "casting of the notification net" to inform the stakeholder, also focused on techniques to engage said stakeholders while in attendance at the specific venue. In this regard, please understand that the engagement techniques although important to planning processes, exceed the scope and purpose of this report.

In September, 2008, the Las Cruces Metropolitan Planning Organization formally adopted policy provisions of public participation strategies that were in use for many years. As mandated by Federal Transportation Regulations, MPO's serving regions with a population of 50,000 or greater are required to adopt a planning process that considers projects beneficial to the furtherance of sound transportation practices. As part of that effort, adoption of a formal public participation process was completed. Therein, the MPO establishes not only the planning process for much of its scope of work, but also the means or tools by which the community notification and engagement will take place. For example, the plan discusses the use of press releases to print, radio and television related media sources, website utilization, an e-newsletter and master mailing list to name a few. These techniques although not always 100% successful in reaching the MPO stakeholders, have proven to at minimum reach a broad cross section of interested parties in an attempt to solicit input on the issues at hand.

Another example involves the significant update and amendment of the University Avenue Corridor Plan and its companion University Avenue Corridor Plan Overlay District. During this effort, first class and certified mail notification, radio spots, flyers, comment boxes, informal discussions with focus groups at area businesses, open houses and "meet and greets" at area businesses were used not only for notification of related stakeholders, but also the advertisement of the project by word of mouth from one interested stakeholder to another.

Finally, a third example involves the recently completed Picturing El Paseo project wherein staff through the United States Environmental Protection Agency's Smart Growth Implementation Assistance program partnered with the United States Environmental Protection Agency, United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, the United States Department of Transportation and a host of local businesses and community based groups and the general public to seek out ways to solicit and engage the public in a planning/visioning process for the El Paseo Corridor. In particular, the effort focused on the inclusion of those groups that historically have been underrepresented and/or otherwise might have felt disenfranchised in past planning efforts. As such, substantial efforts were undertaken to notify and solicit public participation on development of a vision for the El Paseo Corridor ranging from traditional methods (e.g., flyers, posters, surveys, websites, or radio spots) to the contemporary use of social media such as Facebook. Once notified, an equally broad-based approach to engaging the general public ensued to foster trust and buy-in to the planning process. As a result of this project, a "toolkit" for public participation was created with each "tool" identified and discussed in a report entitled *"Public Involvement Plan and Toolkit for Las Cruces,"* a document prepared by EPA staff and consulting staff with considerable input by Community Development staff. This report although not the focus of the issue at hand can be found in Appendix 1.

As illustrated, efforts in the past and present regarding public notification have varied and have in large part been robust in application. As previously indicated, no one method or combined use of various methods can guarantee 100% notification of the target stakeholder. Ultimately, a determination as to the best public notification approach has to be made using a pragmatic application of available options. As such, it is the intent of this report to identify techniques used in the past and present along with emerging trends that can be considered for future notification efforts that are well suited for the variety of issues that require public notification.

After review of the strategies in place today along with consideration of those tested, a comparative review of surrounding communities both large and small was done in March, 2012. The idea behind this comparison was to glean a possible "best practices" model by which to gauge changes to the local notification efforts. A total of seven communities in New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado and California were examined with much of the data obtained speaking to the respective development processes those communities practiced. In summary, the review seems to reveal that although there are some differences in terms of how notification is handled when compared to our measures, there are far more similarities to what we have in place. *This seems to imply that "best practices" at least with notification is what works best for a given community.*

Research showed for instance that notification time frames were often streamlined to reflect one time frame regardless of case type resulting in less confusion for staff and citizen alike. This differs a bit from what is used here in Las Cruces due to our processes having various time frames being imposed depending on the type of case and the method of notification. Also, neighborhood association and/or neighborhood meetings in the absence of an association were often called for early in the application submittal process as a requirement. Here in Las Cruces, we have a policy that has the City notify any applicable neighborhood associations when a development proposal is within association boundaries or within 300 feet of said boundaries. It is the responsibility of the planner handling an applicable case to check for neighborhood associations that may fall within the distance thresholds. The policy also calls for the applicant to give notice via certified letters to association representatives within five days of submitting an application to the City of the intent to develop and to provide detailed information of said development plans. Development as defined by the policy is a submittal package for a zone change, variance, special use permit, master plan, preliminary plat, or annexation. Other nuances gleaned from the research show at least one community providing notice at various times throughout the review/approval process as deemed applicable by the planning manager. Additionally, distance thresholds for notification by that same community are varied and are also determined by the manager based on the merits and or assumed impacts of a given proposal. Thereafter, most of the requirements the communities used fall in line with what Las Cruces presently follows.

Current Issues

At the present time, the City maintains a policy of transparency regarding the many issues it must address on behalf of the citizens of Las Cruces. To accomplish this, the City continues to investigate ways to better inform and/or solicit input in order to make an informed decision. From time to time, some of the issues are contentious and elicit a variety of emotions and input regarding the topic at hand. It is the general feeling and attitude of the public, elected officials and administration that due to these realities, some of the current notification practices are insufficient at notifying the affected stakeholder. As a result, the City has been asked to investigate and implement as applicable, better notification practices to ensure that no stakeholder with significant investment on a given issue is left out of the discussion. This section will examine some of the realities that have to be considered when modifying notification policy. At times it becomes easy to suggest a new approach to notification, but upon further analysis of logistical realities such as operational impacts, it appears that some ideas might be better left for special circumstances as opposed to a matter of general practice.

Cost of Doing Business vs. Assessed Fees. Ideally, the practice and standards in place for notification of the public regarding a great many public processes undertaken by the City are funded in part by applicable fees associated with a requested activity. As an example, when a property owner wishes to convert the zoning of owned land, by regulation, consideration of the request must take on a staff and public review process which has inherent steps and notification measures built in. These processes and steps are in part covered by the fees assessed for the type of request submitted, but are also subsidized by tax-payer dollars. As such, efforts are made to inform the public in a number of ways, each having associated costs. In that these fees are subsidized with general fund monies from City coffers, standard practice dictates utilization of more economical and as a general rule, accepted methods of notification versus approaches that are expensive and suspect in terms of success. It should be mentioned yet again that the last fee increase for a great many of the processes that at least impact Community Development (CD) type activities took place in 2000 with the exception of sign fees being last updated in 1990. In 2006 CD staff analyzed all development fees excepting building permit related fees and proposed various increases based on a more assertive cost recovery model with less subsidy. At that time, staff was asked to continue monitoring the issue, but to not effect fee increases promulgated by the study. The present fees in place are those referenced in the 2006 presentation and are actually those fees established in 2000. Further analysis of notification costs will be undertaken in the Options and Analysis section of this report.

Notification Expectation/Perception. The perception variable of who should and should not receive official notice is one that City staff frequently battles particularly when addressing contentious issues. Again, following established codified notification requirements, staff is invariably presented with questions or concerns over why one neighbor was notified about a case while another neighbor sometimes immediately adjacent to the first was not. In many of these instances, the notification boundaries established simply do not extend far enough to include the second neighbor even though the property may very well be immediately adjacent to the one that received notice. Often, in instances such as these, the general public overlooks the fact that other notification methods are also used such as newspaper notices that in essence provide notice to all City residents, agendas being posted in public locations such as City Hall, and website information (more on this presented later in this report), etc. Staff recognizes that not all citizens receive the newspaper, have a computer and internet capabilities or visit City Hall often enough to catch notice of an upcoming meeting, but the reality is those methods are also used and put into play because no one method has proven 100% effective in notifying affected stakeholders on any given issue. The very nature of required certified mail notification to property owners itself has been shown to be very problematic. In many instances, letters get returned through the post office as undeliverable and/or unclaimed. Such is the nature of certified mail and since the costs for this method are great, the usefulness is often drawn into question.

Resources. Staff and monetary availability for the conduct of notification is also a very real barrier at times. Related to cost of doing business and revenues available to conduct said business, assigned resources are often spread thin for all assigned work. Some of the new innovations or ideas that are labor intensive in nature become really impacted by staff resources. In a recent work session discussion on notification strategies (March 26, 2012), the distribution of flyers (door to door) option was identified as potential enhancement of current notification procedures. What wasn't said; however, was that short of volunteer efforts or payment for services rendered, Community Development staff would be selected to distribute flyers in this manner which then raises a question of whether that effort is truly an effective use of time and money (salaries and benefits) for the staff conducting the work. If the payment for services option is used, current fee assessment in no way considers this cost which then raises the issue of potential fee increases to cover operations. Volunteer efforts could be considered and as a point of fact have been in the past (once - early 1990s) when a group of Boy Scouts offered to deliver re-addressing flyers in the east mesa area. After the first day, one of the scouts was bit by a dog and resulted in the cancellation of their volunteer effort.

Safety and Liability. As important as the need to notify and be inclusive, so to must each option weigh the importance of safety and potential liability exposure. Under the previous paragraph, the door to door option unveiled a very real safety and liability concern. That example did not impact a City staff person directly, but could have if City personnel were used in the conduct of this activity. If not an animal causing concern, there have been many instances when City staffs, acting under their dutiful authority, have been aggressively approached by a citizen questioning the purpose for their presence. Sometimes this approach is assertive in nature and sometimes truly aggressive. Point is there are City positions that can more readily take on that role of asserting their presence and the reason for it (e.g. Code Enforcement Officers, Police Officers, Fire Fighters) while those such as Community Development staff, short of a City issued I.D. card and verbal communication, have little else to assert the validity of their presence. Another example speaks to potential placement of much larger property notification signs (signs currently used for notification of a zoning case, variance, etc. on a subject property). Presently, staff erects these signs on the subject property when application of a development action is made. These signs although designed to draw attention are relatively small to allow ease of placement on the given property. If a much larger sign is considered, installation techniques will have to be changed which may be more of a work hazard to the staff person installing the sign, but also opens up liability issues should placement of the sign cause damage to property such as sprinkler/drip systems buried underground.

Variability. As indicated earlier, notification processes are carried out for many different reasons to alert citizens about a variety of issues. This report highlights activities to a large extent carried out by the Community Development Department, but in truth, several other departments also conduct meetings with members of the general public. As such, these departments must conduct some form of notification as well in order to adequately inform and create successful dialogue with the public. Sometimes the purpose of meetings are directed to known stakeholders that are easily contacted resulting in successful notification while others take on a broad spectrum of stakeholders where direct contact is less manageable requiring other notification options in order to cast a broader notification net. It is for this reason that the options ultimately approved for use as a matter of practice remain flexible and variable depending on the issue and or general circumstances involved. There cannot be a one size fits all approach to notification because doing so may result in a process that far exceeds its goal and becomes inefficient in practice.

Options and Analysis

In order to aid in determining the most suitable approach to conduct notification efforts, this report seeks to identify the most realistic options available and to glean relevant information to aid in the determination of which options might be considered appropriate for use and the circumstances for said use. Information presented will talk to Community Development activities at minimum and will go beyond to those tasks conducted elsewhere in the City when applicable. The data presented will be actual values derived from case files/reports, source information when third party efforts are involved and/or provided by those who are familiar with the respective processes. Where applicable, ideas on how to adjust the stated methods will be presented to improve upon the method identified.

Traditional/Conventional Methods

Mailings – This process is required pursuant to State Law under specific circumstances. The City ordinances also speak to this method and exceeds the time thresholds established by law. If measures are to change, they must be amended within the appropriate sections of the Municipal Code to coincide with revised standards. The average number of letters mailed out varies considerably based on communication purpose and related issues. For case handling within Community Development, the variation is directly related to the type of case and case location. For instance in the core part of the City, the parcels are typically more densely arranged resulting in more letters that are required to meet code. Locations outside this area and particularly on the fringe of the City have larger lots and thus, require less mail-out. However, for purposes of this exercise, the average size mail-out being considered is 25 letters.

Certified Mailings. This mail out method is required pursuant to State and Local law as specified in codified provisions. Cost of certified mailings up to 1 ounce in weight (typical notification letter) currently costs \$5.75 per letter (return certified receipt). Other online options for preparing and tracking certified mailouts appear cheaper by \$0.80 per letter, but when adding the United States Postal Service approved certified envelope to coincide with the online printing format, the costs actually increase by as much as \$0.75 per envelope bringing the cost upwards of \$6.50 per certified letter. Using the case average of 25 letters, the average notification costs involving certified mail-outs is \$153.75 (includes envelope cost of \$0.40 each).

Potential Adjustment. In that certified mailings have been problematic with property owners due to USPS delivery parameters and the need to pick up the letter from the post office when delivery was attempted and not successful (property owner not available for signature), the City may opt to more closely follow State Law minimum requirements and only carryout certified mailings for zoning related cases and even then, only send certified letters when zoning of property is one block or less in size. Certified letters would be distributed to the subject property and to the properties within the first 100 feet (state law minimum) of the City's prescribed 200 foot notification boundary; excluding right-of-way. Anything rezoned above the one block size would all be sent notification letters via first class mailing consistent with State law. Amendment to City regulations will be required should this be considered an acceptable approach. As an alternative, local codes and State Statute merely indicate the use of certified mailing when necessary, but do not require signed return paper receipts as has been standard practice for years. As such, opting for electronic email receipts in lieu of paper receipts saves \$1.20 for each letter bringing costs per letter to \$4.95. A certificate of mailing option is available through the post office, but based on website information, is NOT considered as a form of certified mailing. If it were, costs would equal the email receipt option.

Table 2. Mailing Cost Comparisons

	<i>1st Class</i>	<i>Certified w/printed return receipt</i>	<i>Certified w/email receipt</i>	<i>Certificate of Mailing</i>
<i>Service Charge</i>	-	\$2.95	\$2.95	\$2.95
<i>Postage</i>	\$0.45	\$0.45	\$0.45	\$0.45
<i>Printed return receipt</i>	-	\$2.35	-	-
<i>Email receipt</i>	-	-	\$1.15	-
<i>Certificate of Mailing</i>	-	-	-	\$1.15
<i>Envelope Standard</i>	\$0.40	\$0.40	\$0.40	\$0.40
Sub-total per letter	\$0.85	\$6.15	\$4.95	\$4.95
Total cost for average 25 letter mailing	\$21.25	\$153.75	\$123.75	\$123.75*

*Note: May not meet certified mailing definition pursuant to State Law.

First Class Mailings. With Community Development case handling involving subdivision, and any other process that requires recommendation from a subordinate body to City Council, first class mailing announcing that body's hearing or meeting is required. Currently the cost for up to a 1 ounce letter is \$0.45. Assuming the case average of 25 letters, total subordinate hearing mailing costs are \$11.65 (includes envelope costs of \$0.40 each). Beyond those activities conducted by Community Development, first class mailing is not a requirement for notification of affected property owners but is often recommended. In instances where notification is prudent, first class letters should continue to be used as the method of choice for notification. Any board or committee that has criteria for "reasonable notice" calling for certified letter notification should modify said criteria to use first class mailings unless state law prohibits this action.

Potential Adjustment. See Certified Mailings discussion for any modification to existing practice. Also, examine reasonable notice provisions with all boards and committees and modify letter notification requirements to coincide with a first class mailing option.

Newspaper ads, Legal Section – Presently both State (dependent on process) and local ordinance require posting of meeting and case related information in "a newspaper of general circulation" prior to the public hearing where said case will be heard. The two local newspapers where posting may occur include the Las Cruces Sun News and the Las Cruces Bulletin. Although the Bulletin has been used in the past as an alternative, the Sun News has the most readership and circulation numbers particularly on Sunday editions where numbers jump considerably. Additionally, the Bulletin is a weekly paper whereas the Sun News is a daily paper offering better opportunities to meet posting requirements and reach out to the largest group for notification purposes. Cost associated with an "average" ad regarding a Planning and Zoning Commission meeting listing the respective cases slated for consideration is \$144.00. Obviously fluctuations exist on a monthly basis, but generally speaking this average exists for this specific body. Other subordinate boards also require ads to be posted and costs for those postings is likely to be very similar in that similar requirements to meet New Mexico Open Meetings Act standards apply to all committees, boards, commissions, etc.

Potential Adjustment. None is recommended. That said, in the past, various citizens at least from the Community Development perspective have advised of the need to post a "regular" ad in the State/local section of the

newspaper rather than the legal section. The legal section has been used for decades in that the ad is a legal requirement and that this section of the newspaper is where said postings are placed and where citizens have gone to seeking information on municipal government meeting activities. Additionally, placing an ad elsewhere in the newspaper in a manner similar to the ads placed when the City seeks board members, etc. (2"X4" ad) are considerably more expensive. In fact, the amount for a weekday posting is approximately \$255.00 and approximately \$277.00 for weekend postings. Additionally, there is no incontrovertible proof that ads placed elsewhere in the paper receive more attention than those placed in the legal section.

Property Signs – For all cases presently heard by the Planning and Zoning Commission and/or the Extra-territorial Planning Commission, signs identifying the case and relaying relevant information about the upcoming meeting where the case will be heard are placed in the most suitable location on the property in question. These signs are printed on a material called "duraplast" which is in essence corrugated plastic (similar to corrugated cardboard) and measure 18" by 24". Much of the information contained on the sign stock is pre-printed requiring some to be hand-written indicating the specific case number and date of the respective meeting. For cost savings, the Community Development Department will often purchase signs in bulk from the same company for all case types handled. Generally, these signs cost \$4.04 per sign. Depending on the size of the parcel being acted on and the number of frontages said parcel may have, two or more signs may be erected on the property in order to more adequately provide notice.

Potential Adjustment. As of the writing of this report, staff was unaware of any requirements by any other body calling for sign posting. In order to provide better communication to the general public, staff would recommend that all boards, commissions and committees that have an issue specific to a tract or parcel of land wherein said board, committee or commission will act on an issue potentially impacting surrounding properties, neighborhoods, etc., post signs in similar vein as what is done in Community Development. Said adjustment does not guarantee a higher degree of communication with the general public, but does serve as an added measure if none currently exists.

Neighborhood Association Notification/Mailing. As previously stated, a policy is in place for notification of registered neighborhood associations when development takes place. Three key performance aspects call for 1) the City to notify any applicable registered neighborhood associations when a development proposal is within association boundaries or within 300 feet of said boundaries; 2) the applicant to give notice via certified letters to association representatives within five days of submitting an application to the City of the intent to develop and to provide detailed information of said development plans; and 3) the neighborhood association to allow open membership to persons within prescribed boundaries, hold at least one meeting per year along with other operational parameters deemed to be fair and democratic in nature. For purposes of the policy, development as defined by the policy is a submittal package for a zone change, variance, special use permit, master plan, preliminary plat, or annexation.

Potential Adjustment. As earlier stipulated, some communities have codified the requirement regarding neighborhood association notification when pending development is imminent. The provision could call for proof of notification and proof of holding a meeting (assumes association contact only) to discuss the aspects of the request prior to scheduling the case before the first hearing body to which the case would otherwise be directed. Failure to provide the necessary proof to City staff would then cause the case to be postponed indefinitely until evidence can otherwise be presented. Amendments to an original submittal made by the applicant could cause additional notification and meetings with the association. It should be stipulated that notice to association bodies could be via first class mail or email to the top representatives of the group. It would then be their responsibility to notify their membership of any and all meetings with the applicant on the matter. As a point of reference regarding existing operations, staff routinely recommends notification of pending developments by the applicant to neighborhood associations, but has not codified authority to ensure this has taken place.

Contemporary Methods

Website Information. The City of Las Cruces has maintained its website for approximately 10 years having changed format and software once since its inception. For approximately four years under the previous format, the Community Development Department along with other City departments utilized the website to announce meetings, issues and various informational items that were a benefit to the community at large. The Community Development Department as an example, structured a few web pages for the sole purpose of announcing incoming development proposals submitted for further processing, consideration and approval. Said proposals were related to planning, subdivision, zoning, annexation and variance activities. As designed, a customer could in fact review the titles of all proposals, determine the date of submittal, review a synopsis of the development application, and finally track to an extent, the review process and status of said proposal. In that the posting of information was handled in-house, costs associated with the upkeep of said data was limited to staff salary and benefits per the amount of time taken each month to maintain the data. It is estimated that approximately \$1,900 per year was spent maintaining this information on a monthly basis. This amount was derived by taking the Planning Technician Senior salary and benefits multiplying this amount by the approximate number of hours each month taken to update the information (approximately 6 hours), times 12 (number of months).

With the launch of the new City website, the old webpage format for posting of development information became incompatible. As such, efforts are presently underway to launch a similar development notification application in the new web environment. Staff has met with the Information Technology Department to determine how best to approach this transition. Staff has requested significant changes in how the information is displayed so that a more interactive and graphical query process and delivery of information can be achieved. Unfortunately, staff has been advised that there are limitations to requested improvements especially where the graphics are concerned at the present time. Staff hopes that in the near future, the new information can be posted and maintained so to provide the needed information to those that can gain access via the internet. Although initial costs to establish the new environment will be higher than the \$1,900 due to the number of staff interacting on and engaging the development of the application through the new environment, ongoing maintenance is expected to remain virtually the same as before with perhaps slight increases per annum as salaries are adjusted. This option is a very useful tool for the dissemination of information however as stated, is limited to those

with internet access only. Those without, will see significantly less benefit, but can utilize one of the other options discussed and presented.

Potential Adjustment. Staff is in the process of creating a similar application as before within the new website environment. Staff will continue to pursue a more interactive and graphical approach to querying out case, plan or information items that are specific to geographic areas that might be of interest to citizens as opposed to City-wide issues. Doing so will allow neighborhoods and property owners/tenants an opportunity to see what issues are potentially taking place in their neighborhood. Should such an application come online with these features in mind, staff recommends that all departments maintain a similar setup in that they too have issues that are often applicable or of interest to neighborhoods and/or residents city-wide.

Listserv/Email Notification. The idea for a list service whereby users that have "opted in" for emails to be sent to their pre-defined email address informing them of issues has been in use for several years in the computing world. The idea is not too different from what is discussed in the Newsletter option that follows in context to the distribution aspects, but through the use of software specifically designed to host a listserv, the flexibility to create, provide and distribute information and allow subscribers a venue for interaction on a given topic is far more robust. L-Soft Corporation for example presently sells a product called LISTSERV and can be used in tandem with our existing website and is scalable to serve the City's existing and future needs. The product, based on initial review, is compatible with the City's existing computer environment and allows the management of all types of mailing lists, including email newsletters, announcement lists, discussion groups and email communities. Features within the product allow for the management of content posted on a given topic and include security features that prevent the software's use from becoming a threat to the City's network. Further research is pending on the ListServ option by the City's Information Technology Department and costs for implementation of this technology varies depending on software version purchased and number of seats needed. As such, prices may range from \$500 to roughly \$9,500. Assuming the upper price range considers far more licenses that the City may need, initial estimates place an anticipated price for purchase of the product at approximately \$4,000.

Use of a simple email distribution list is a very basic alternative. Once again, those wishing to subscribe and receive development related information would merely have to supply a valid email address which could be housed on the network if multiple departments wished to use the source or could be housed by staff handling development matters. Once a proposal was submitted, those individuals could receive basic information about the proposal along with PDF scans of all related submittal documents. The application requires no additional software other than what is in use today, but would require maintenance of the email list when individuals modify contact information and/or otherwise opt out of the service.

Potential Adjustment. None. With exception of the basic email notification aspect, this is a new application that would come online if chosen as an acceptable and implementable option.

Newsletter. Newsletters have been used by various departments within the City organization for many years and for a variety of purposes. Three current examples involve the monthly Metropolitan Planning Organization's Intersections newsletter, the official City of Las Cruces quarterly newsletter, Community Connections and finally the City Manager's weekly newsletter to City Council. The purpose for each of these newsletters is to inform the community and Council of various organization and topic specific items that may be of interest to citizens, stakeholders and Councilors/staff alike, but are uniquely different in content and associated distribution. Intersections for example, is prepared by MPO staff, contains information about activities and issues involving the MPO region and transportation planning in general and is distributed to individuals and groups that have asked to be informed of all things MPO. Thus, recipients are those that have since been identified on an email list maintained by the MPO. Community Connections on the other hand, is a newsletter that is prepared by City staff, contains a variety of topics related to the City and the services it provides and is distributed to approximately 58,000 households in the Las Cruces community. The City Manager newsletter is very topic specific to the organization and is intended to keep the City Council informed on significant issues that are ongoing within the organization or that have come up in meetings. The newsletter although intended for Council, is distributed to City staff and various stakeholders that have asked to be included on the distribution email list maintained by staff.

From a distribution standpoint, Community Connections utilizes the most current mailing list obtained through the local United States Post Office based on carrier route address data. At a mailing cost of approximately \$9,000 each quarter

(does not include production costs), Community Connections is by far one of, if not the most expensive newsletters the City distributes for the purposes of maintaining an informed community. In that other departments may have a need to distribute information in a similar manner; further examination of the distribution numbers and mailing costs may need to be examined. If for example, Community Development distributes a newsletter on all things planning, zoning, housing, and development, staff would have to determine whether distribution would be via an email list created and maintained in similar fashion as the MPO and City Manager newsletters or whether staff would try and isolate the distribution to areas directly affected by the issues, developments or topics discussed therein. In addition, staff would need to determine whether to send the information to property owners only (using Dona Ana County Assessor data) or to all residents within a notification area defined by staff. In either case, distribution would try to isolate a specific distance around a development proposal or area where a plan is being drafted, and could be distributed to either all residents via data sources recommended by the USPS such as Maronics (isolating to closest carrier route level) or again, property owners specifically. At roughly \$0.16 a newsletter (based on Community Connection data) for postage, costs are within reason if property owner distribution will suffice. If resident notification is desired, a service like Maronics could provide deliverable address within a prescribed distance around a subject property, but will increase costs by \$100 at minimum for each distribution list provided by the Maronics service. In that their service isolates a radially defined geographic area with a centroid defined by address, intersection, or other geographic marker, staff would have to manipulate the data to a degree in order to limit the distribution to those most likely impacted by a proposal without duplicating mailing list or service costs when multiple areas within a relatively small distance from one another are under development or planning consideration. Either way, each option would necessitate a budget increase to the postage budget line item to accommodate the anticipated monthly distribution of information pursuant to the development submittal process. Other than the costs represented in this option, it is very difficult to isolate an approximate overall cost per month for providing a notification newsletter using the resident notification approach. In terms of the newsletter preparation costs, that is entirely dependent on the amount of data and information shared based on the newsletter format that is ultimately created. To give some idea of costs however, the MPO newsletter takes one staff person four hours to generate. Admittedly, the newsletter is very basic in design and not very lengthy in content. If the salary and benefit schedule used for the website application is applied, approximate production costs for a newsletter is roughly \$1,300 per year.

Potential Adjustment. None. This is a new application for various departments inclusive of Community Development (non-MPO) that would come online if chosen as an acceptable and implementable option. The purpose, focus and distribution timing of such an application dictates the level of complexity and amount of resources absorbed.

Social Media. As social media grows in popularity, so do the opportunities for utilization of this venue for purposes of public notification. The two most popular social media applications in use today are Facebook and Twitter. The applications are entirely web based, but are accessible via desktop computers, notebook or laptop computers, tablets (e.g. iPad) and even smartphones. Several studies with one of the most recent being by www.onlinemba.com, show amazing use statistics for these top two popular applications which translates into a very strong possibility of successfully disseminating necessary information to a target audience. As with most things, each application has its drawbacks. Twitter for example might be used to tweet simple announcements of no more than 140 characters in length to persons in the community that have opted to follow a specific department or related activities; however, the message, due to the character limitations, may not allow an adequate amount of information to be posted about an issue or case submittal and there are no capabilities to post or attach pictures or graphics to the tweeted message which may help convey issue specific information.

Facebook on the other hand, has a 60,000 character length limit on what is called a status update (may be an announcement of pending developments submitted for review), and also allows the insertion of pictures or graphics that can demonstrate further what an issue involves. Individuals like with Twitter, may "friend" a department and in so doing, learn about projects or other information that the department intends to share such as development proposals. Facebook allows "friends" to share information and post comments about the posted message and as such, the application can in essence become a discussion forum of sorts wherein individuals with similar or divergent viewpoints can discuss the merits or faults of a specific issue. This in turn allows staff an opportunity to obtain a clearer picture of any and all concerns regarding the subject at hand. At least with Facebook, one potential drawback may involve the need to moderate the site regularly and eliminate comments that have inappropriate content. This effort becomes an issue that directly impacts cost of service in that staff would be assigned to the task and would have to monitor activity regularly. There is presently no data that staff is aware of that can translate this effort over any given time into costs associated with doing so.

In regards to social media, the City continues to study the issue surrounding its use thus, there are no specific guidelines to follow at this time. In addition to receiving permission to use such a method, staff would be learning in part what it takes to maintain such an outlet for municipal information.

Potential Adjustment. None. Although some limited applications have either been or are currently in use, this option is for all intents and purposes a new application that would come online if chosen as an acceptable and implementable form of communication.

Robo-Calls or Voice Broadcasting. Robo-calls so called due to the nature of the outgoing call to residents by a digitally recorded message played via automated means are considered by some to be a blessing and by others the bane of human existence. Robo-calls have received national attention to say the least in that this modern technology allows a pre-recorded message to be delivered and played to large numbers of potential listeners without consuming a large amount of resources. Politicians have used this technology as of late to solicit support during an election and sometimes to garner support for a position or view. Conceivably, this technology may be used by municipalities to disseminate information on issues, policies, cases or events that the City is dealing with or involved with. The applicability can be useful in almost all of what the City may deal with throughout any given year. At least from a Community Development perspective, meeting reminders could be sent to affected residents informing them generally of cases that may be of interest to them within the neighborhood in which they reside. The timing of the message is important in that if delivered too soon, the message may be forgotten. Too late, and there may not be enough time to arrange schedules in order to attend the intended meeting. Robo-calls like telephone polls or surveys are often viewed as a nuisance to the general public in that the message or call is made generally in the evening in hopes of catching the intended audience at home or away from work where the call can be received more appropriately. During this time however, citizens are usually home relaxing from the day's activities or having dinner with family and/or friends and thus, when the call comes through, the household activity is disrupted.

Agencies that coordinate and assist with robo-calling activities do exist and based on information obtained from one source, Dynamic Interactive, they have previously provided services for the City. The agent informed staff that the lowest geographic area for which phone numbers could be provided (assuming the City had no numbers to provide) was by zip code. This effort could be provided at no extra charge. Beyond that, cost for the service was stated to be \$0.03 per call. Based on website information, there exists an opportunity to have calls reach live persons with the intended message, leave messages on answering machines/services, or a blended recipient approach whereby the message could be received either live or left on or with answering devices/services. Unless the City had phone number sources available for a smaller geographic area than zip code, a "message campaign" would be received by persons in a much larger area than what may be considered the "affected area" of an issue, plan or case. There may be opportunities for the manipulation of the City's customer database via Munis and ArcMap to isolate specific persons/properties for the purpose of obtaining a more limited number of recipients by which to launch a message campaign. The effort to do this with each campaign may require considerable staff resources and may be somewhat problematic if phone number record information is absent in the customer profile. Testing of the database to select out records by a smaller geographic area and to determine available phone information has NOT been completed. Until this is done, the extent of resources to carry out the task is unknown.

The message itself will have to include as staff understands it, an opt out action at the start of the message that allows citizens a chance to end the call and also request not to be placed on a similar call campaign again. This action would comply with the Telephone Consumer Protection Act of 1991 (TCPA). Similarly, Dynamic Interactive suggests the message also include an option for more information which if selected would automatically dial the number of staff persons that may be available to provide said information. This feature could prove problematic if the limited staff on hand to carry out that role were busy and/or there were not enough staff on hand familiar with the case(s) to provide the information. The logistics of robo-calling would definitely have to be carefully considered prior to launching this option by any City department.

Potential Adjustment. None. This is a new application that would come online if chosen as an acceptable and implementable option. It should be noted that the Do not Call Registry as staff understands it, has no impact on messages of public benefit such as what is being proposed herein. With the option to opt out and an option to obtain more information, any proposed City generated call campaign appears to be in keeping with Federal and State Law.

Nixle or CityWatch. Nixle Connect, the most widely used product in the Nixle arsenal is a community information service that allows public agencies the opportunity to distribute authenticated and authorized messages to the general public via email and/or text messaging. Recipients of these messages must subscribe to the Nixle service at no cost and may opt to receive the messages either in email or text form (controlled by the subscriber). This is helpful for users that have limited texting on their cell phone service plan. Message types allowed by Nixle vary, but those supported by and relevant to this report are typically deemed priority/alert or emergency messages, less important advisory messages (like a weather advisory), traffic messages, or community information messages (i.e. announcing public meetings or case submittals, etc.). The Police and Fire Departments currently use Nixle for emergency/priority related messaging and based on the Nixle representative, use of the service for this specific purpose is free to public agencies. General community communication that might provide public announcements such as development submittal information or community meeting notices are treated differently from a cost perspective. Based on an estimate, City costs for Nixle Connect for non-priority alert purposes are based on the population and would be approximately \$4,400 per year. There is no limit on the number of messages sent or the number of department representatives that become authenticated distributors of messages. Thus, from a cost sharing perspective, the service could become very cost effective. One key aspect with this service as with other methods discussed that require subscribers that opt in to that service is the need to promote and widely advertise the service and its benefits. If there is no promotion campaign that seeks out subscribers, the value of this service will be limited at best. According to the representative, current subscribers that receive emergency service announcements number 1,845. This seems like a low number based on the 2010 census 21 years of age or greater population cohort which is listed as 68,599. This cohort was selected for reference in that they are most likely to possess email or a cell phone and wish to follow municipal issues that might affect their lifestyle, property, etc

One item worthy of mention is the possibility of adding to the Nixle service a feature called Nixle Dial which allows voice messaging capabilities much like robo-calls. Costs were not obtained for this service, but the fact that it is an option might make the overall method appealing in order to accommodate future need and allow contact to those that might not have cell service.

CityWatch is software that has been purchased and is presently available for departments to use in very similar vein as Nixle. In fact based on a quick comparison, it appears that CityWatch operates much like Nixle with exception of having an option for voice messaging. Staff's understanding at this time is that the Public Information Office is promoting the product and trying to get more departments on board with its use. As of this writing staff is unaware of any ongoing costs associated with non-priority alert messaging such as meeting announcements or case submittal announcements.

Potential Adjustment. None. For purposes of broadcasting public service messages other than priority alerts, this would be considered a new application that would come online if chosen as an acceptable and implementable option.

CLC-TV. Another outlet for distribution of information already exists and has been in use for a number of years. CLC-TV program formatting allows information such as weekly development submittal information to be displayed as part of the daily programming via static bulletin slides. With assistance from the Public Information Office, a template could be prepared that allows a designated staff person within any given department to create a table that reflects information to be shared with the public. In the case of Community Development as an example, any and all development activity and contact information could be entered on a weekly basis for display via CLC-TV and the associated static bulletin slides. Activity would be dated so that the most recent is shown first within the table with all other entries for a given month identified in the order received. The information would be updated weekly with only the current month's data reflected. Based on the document "Policy and Guidelines for the Operation and Use of CLC-TV", costs associated with this type of effort may exist, but are built into operational budgets that PIO requests each year.

Although this method is useful, not everybody watches CLC-TV and thus, the message and/or dissemination of information may not reach the intended audience or a large enough audience to have a significant impact. That said, it is yet another avenue to notify the public on municipal operational matters that might not otherwise be distributed.

Potential Adjustment. As needed by individual departments. Although CLC-TV is in operation at present, bulletin slides for the purposes identified will have to be prepared for use through this venue. This effort would take minimal effort to carry out.

Door Hangers. The last option this report will speak to for the dissemination of information involves the use of door hangers. So called due to the method cards typically 4.5 inches by 11 inches are placed at the front entrance of residences, door hangers are what some consider a fairly inexpensive method for informing the general public of sales, services and other information. At the dimensions listed above, there is a finite level of information that can be conveyed to the public. Costs for simple card production are \$75 per 500 cards printed with a price break at 1,000 cards (\$110). The number of cards that any one issue may require from a distribution perspective will vary significantly, but in terms of case handling via the Community Development Department, the numbers will align with the mailing option presently in place unless tenant notification will also be required. The real costs for this type of method come in the form of personnel used for card distribution. It is unrealistic to consider entry level staff as the distributor of related information in that staff time and resources can be used more effectively elsewhere in the organization. Conceivably however, co-op students hired on by the respective departments may be used for this purpose inasmuch as the salaries for these individuals are significantly lower than full-time equivalent (FTE) positions even at the entry level. Other distribution options might include outsourcing the distribution although in discussions with a local printer that provided the printing quote, there are no businesses at present that are set up to carry out this type of effort. It was stated that typically the businesses that distribute flyers and door hangers throughout the community use their own staffs for the effort. As such, an option as in the case of Community Development case handling may be to require an individual(s) that have a case pending before the Planning and Zoning Commission or other body to distribute door hangers with all applicable information within a period stipulated by the City. These hangars could be delivered to property owners/residents located on properties pre-defined by City staff. Even with this option, in order to reap the greatest cost savings benefit, generic door hangers would have to be printed with information regarding the case number and meeting type and date left blank. It is anticipated that this information would either have to be filled in by City personnel or the applicant. It is not anticipated that a large number of hangars would be needed for any one particular case assuming property owners/locations would only receive a hangar (in lieu of residents), nonetheless, staff would view this need to be handled by the applicant.

One concern with actual entry onto private property whether by City personnel or other individuals is the safety factor involved. As previously identified, angry property owners/tenants and/or pets may pose serious problems for those distributing the hangars. Also, complaints about littering are also possibilities given our windy weather during certain times of the year.

Potential Adjustment. None. This is a new application that would come online if chosen as an acceptable and implementable option.

Staff Recommendation

Based on the information provided and discussed, staff feels that the present process for the dissemination of information regarding City issues/business can be improved. At least with the efforts carried out by the Community Development Department most of what presently is in place will have to largely remain as stipulated by State law. Without question, the current practice seemingly falls short of providing the necessary notice to residents that may otherwise be affected by pending actions and in many instances has shown to be a burden on property owners as in the case and use of certified mailings. As such, implementation of a few of the unconventional or contemporary ways for distributing information may positively impact and bolster notice requirements and serve to be yet another tangible option for improving communication and engagement between City government and the citizens it serves. At the very least, said improvement sets the stage for opportunities to engage the public on various matters. Once notice has been received however, the difficult task becomes how best to involve those interested on the topics at hand in order to extract the essence of all related issues, the positives, negatives, ideas and ultimately solutions that provide a win-win scenario for the stakeholders involved. Tips and strategies on how best to achieve this can be found in the document identified earlier entitled "*Public Involvement Plan and Toolkit for Las Cruces*" which is attached as an appendix to this report.

Staff therefore would recommend each department consider and engage the following actions related to the types of notification processes the City typically undertakes.

Departmental review

Each department within the City should investigate the information contained in this report to identify ways of improving overall City/Citizen communication as it relates to projects, general information dissemination, case handling and processing, solicitation of input and similar activities. Upon review of related recommendations, each department should then initiate a notification policy that will be adhered to when soliciting or seeking to engage the general public on municipal matters deemed to have a direct impact on residents. Adequate detail will be necessary to outline the various instances where notification is required, how it will be achieved and the manner by which costs will be covered if applicable.

- 1) Review and adherence to minimum State Law requirements should be maintained at all costs as the process/issue dictates. Legal section use for legally mandated notification will still be used primarily due to costs, but ads when appropriate should be considered as a viable alternative when issues and opportunities for said use are deemed more prudent.
- 2) Certified mail used in the conduct of citizen notification should be converted to first class mail as applicable. Departments should examine "reasonable notice" requirements that may have been established for themselves or the boards, committees, commissions they interact with and if certified mailings are a requirement, revision of same should be undertaken to enact notice via first class mail. In lieu of the delivery certificate certified mail provides, an "Affidavit of Notice" reflecting those individuals that were sent notice along with the date and purpose of the notice can be generated and filed for future reference with the corresponding case or project file.
- 3) Sign use and placement should be considered by department staff across the organization when department activities impact a specific parcel or tract of land whereby providing limited information about pending actions to the general public within reasonable distance is prudent.
- 4) Website modification and implementation of key projects and undertakings by each department should be considered as a means of informing the public of same and the relevant issue(s) that pertain. Anticipated actions, dates of meetings, status updates and related information should be conveyed and maintained as applicable.
- 5) Listserv related software should be examined for its applicability across all department lines to help establish listings of citizens wishing to engage the public process regarding issues and projects the City is involved with. Dissemination of information can then be initiated as necessary and a forum established wherein topics can be debated and input received on an issue. At minimum, email distribution lists should be collected, maintained and used for distribution of applicable information.

- 6) Social Media should be considered as a viable addition to methods used in informing the general public. As indicated previously, those interested in the applicable departments actions or work programs could "friend" said department and monitor work flow and related commentary received by others or the City. The popularity and flexibility of access to this method proves to be worthy of further consideration.
- 7) Neighborhood association notification pursuant to the policy as written should be consistently applied, practiced and enforced by all departments within the City. Respective City staff should examine how best to codify related provisions thus encouraging neighborhoods to organize and register with the City which in turn allows for a better communication conduit between City and the respective neighborhood.
- 8) CLC-TV should be used to convey projects, issues, development submittal, etc. through the use of static bulletin slides. The option and parameters for its use are largely in place and costs associated with this method are low.
- 9) Nixle/City Watch should be investigated for implementation on an organization wide basis. In fact City Watch which is already available appears to be taking this course at present. Costs for City Watch are moot at this point in that the City has already purchased the software product. Costs for Nixel should the City wish to go this direction are reasonable and may prove to have a greater benefit in that voice calling capabilities are a possible add-on to the Nixle product. Either way, promotion of this method and venue if implemented will be necessary in order to truly have the greatest impact for the dissemination of information with the added bonus of allowing those interested to opt into the service and receive updates with little to no significant impact to their daily routine.

Conclusion

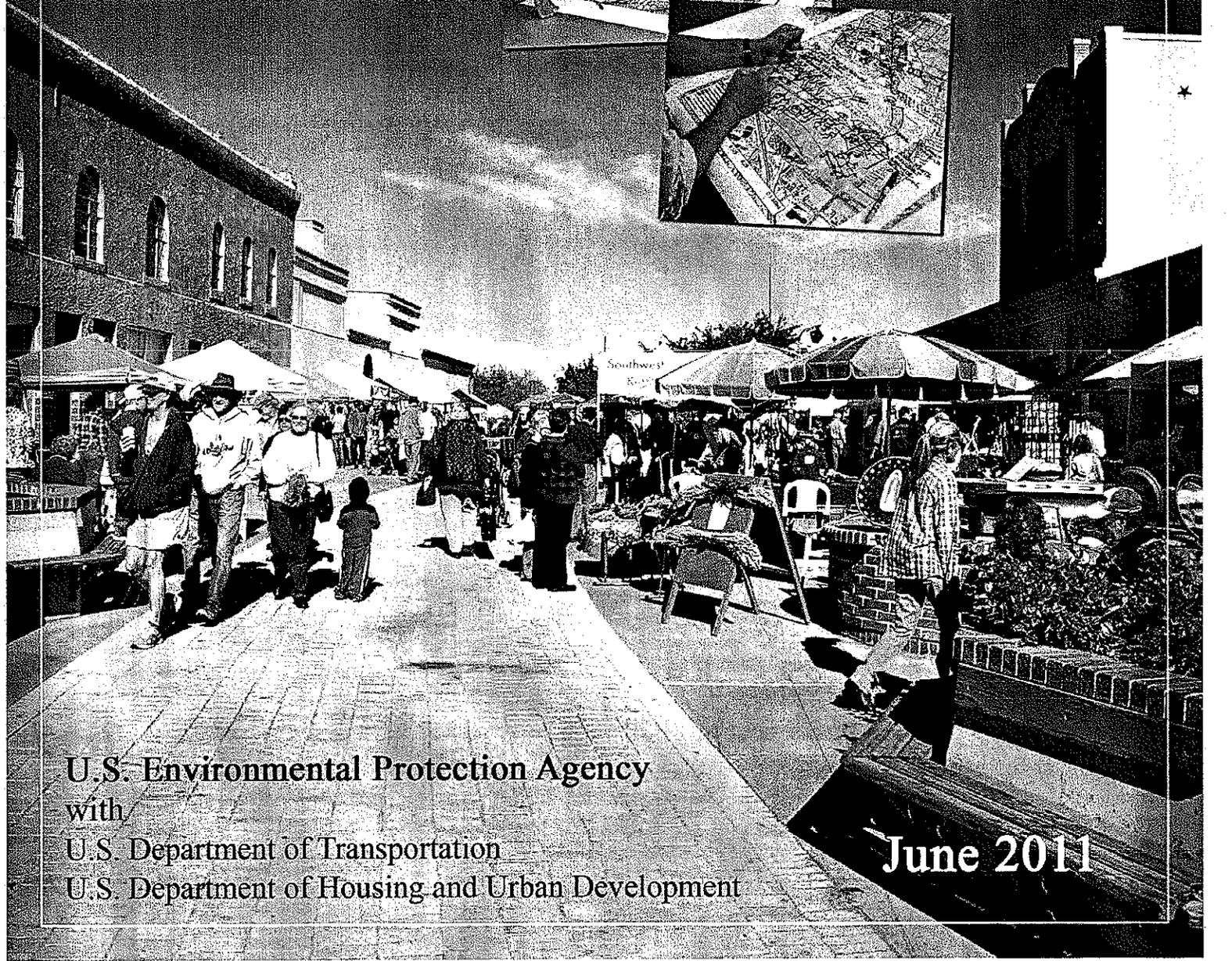
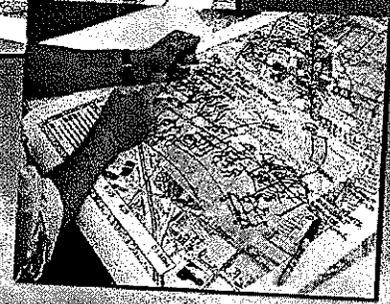
As the report stipulates, there are various departmental activities that require notification of residents and sometimes those processes are policy while others are tied to State Law and/or local ordinance. The report findings clearly demonstrate that in many instances the processes undertaken to provide notice while many, may not be reaching various stakeholder groups adequately or effectively. In hopes of improving successful notification strategies, this report suggest that various contemporary methods be examined by the respective departments within the City organization in hopes of determining which of those listed may bolster notification effectiveness as a means to better inform the citizenry. While implementation of additional methods may improve notification effectiveness, it goes without saying that there will never be a 100 percent level of effectiveness no matter how many methods are employed. Additionally, some of these methods come at a price in either soft or hard costs and as such, have to be balanced in context to the degree of which successful notification will be measured. Absorbing these costs by government can take place on a limited basis so as not to impact approved/future budgets and due to related limitations, other strategies of covering costs will have to be examined for many of the services provided particularly those involving public notification. Cost sharing as an example with parties for which notification requirements stem should be looked at and may very well come in the form of increased application/processing fees. This issue is a debate for another time and is not the focus of this report. Nonetheless, it needs to be said that the more complex and varied a process such as notification gets, the more costly the process becomes.

Appendix

Public Involvement Plan and Toolkit

Attached to this report as reflected on subsequent pages is the Public Involvement Plan and Toolkit which was referenced earlier in this report. Although different in focus, the toolkit is nonetheless part of the overall process of engaging the community once they have been made aware through notification, of any issues that may be of interest regarding municipal activities.

Public Involvement Plan and Toolkit for Las Cruces



U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
with
U.S. Department of Transportation
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

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I. BACKGROUND

The city of Las Cruces is committed to developing a robust public participation model that includes deliberative planning and visioning processes. To that end, the city applied for technical assistance through the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency's Smart Growth Implementation Assistance program (see Appendix A for a description of the program). The goal was to develop a Public Involvement Plan and Toolkit that include strategies that invite and maintain the participation of all residents, especially ethnically diverse, low-income populations and others that have had limited to no previous involvement in community planning and design. Creative outreach and participation strategies that focus more on pictures than words were tested in two visioning workshops for the El Paseo corridor, a 1.7-mile corridor that extends southeast from Main Street in downtown Las Cruces to the New Mexico State University campus. The Public Involvement Plan and Toolkit summarize the process this project created and includes many, but not all, of the outreach and participation tools the project used to begin developing a vision for the El Paseo corridor. The plan and toolkit are intended to be used by city staff for all city efforts requiring public involvement.

Through the assistance, the city hopes to:

- Implement new public participation models that use multiple and non-traditional techniques to engage—and build collaborations among—the government, residents, and other stakeholders.
- Demonstrate the application of public participation tools to redevelopment efforts in the El Paseo corridor area that support fair choices in housing, mobility, and commercial activity.
- Develop options for how a public participation strategy or toolkit could be applied to the city's larger, comprehensive planning efforts.

EPA selected the city of Las Cruces because of the city's interest in developing inclusive public participation strategies that would help Las Cruces become a more sustainable and equitable community by:

- Promoting biking and walking as a safe alternative to driving.
- Reusing brownfields and vacant and underused parcels, thereby reducing pressure to develop on open space and agricultural land.
- Encouraging a mix of residential and commercial uses for residents and visitors regardless of race, ethnicity, or income level in the El Paseo corridor, as well as throughout the city.

- Incorporating landscaping into street design and site development to reduce flooding and improve water quality (commonly referred to as “green infrastructure”).

Though written specifically for city of Las Cruces staff and decision-makers, the strategies and tools compiled in this document will be useful for many other communities wishing to expand the conversations about development to include populations that have often remained outside of decision-making process because of socioeconomic issues and language barriers. A more inclusive decision-making process can help communities identify and decide upon policies that encourage development that is good for the environment, the economy, public health, and the community.

“Picturing El Paseo” – A Snapshot

The El Paseo corridor was selected by Las Cruces staff as the location to test public involvement practices because of its potential to accommodate future mixed-use, development that would still serve the needs of existing residents and users. Staff from EPA, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), along with the EPA contractor ESMpr and city of Las Cruces staff, made up the project team that developed a public involvement process and selected (and sometimes created) specific involvement tools.

El Paseo Road is an active corridor with a mix of uses and a diverse population, many of whom rely on public transit or walking to get around, including low-income families, senior citizens, and high school and university students. The corridor is home to some of the highest commercial vacancy rates in the city. The design is heavily automobile-oriented and is dominated by strip malls separated from the street by vast, mostly empty parking lots. These design factors, combined with heavy automobile traffic, make the area unpleasant and dangerous to pedestrians.

In the spring and summer of 2010, city staff undertook extensive community outreach in preparation for workshops in the fall using the outreach tools described in Section IV. Strategies ranged from using social media and establishing a project website (www.picturingelpaseo.org) to more direct engagement with citizens through an activity called “Planners with Scanners.” In this activity, city staff went out into the community to senior centers, coffee shops, and other places to gather stories about what El Paseo used to be—a vibrant street where one would go to “see and be seen.”

The two “Picturing El Paseo” visioning workshops were held in the fall of 2010 to test outreach and participation strategies collected and developed by the project team. The first visioning workshop was held in October 2010. This workshop was for invited stakeholder groups to test participation techniques and to train city staff to lead the second visioning workshop. A photobook created to summarize the activities is included in Appendix B. The second public

workshop was held in November and was open to the public. In both workshops, activities were very visual: annotating maps, using visual preference surveys on computers, and artists drawing participants' ideas for El Paseo in real time. Participants were also broken into small groups to assemble photographs that city staff collected from people prior to the workshop into a collage that illustrated what they liked and did not like about the corridor area.

As part of the visioning process, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) funded a one-day road safety audit (RSA) in October 2010. An RSA is a formal safety performance evaluation of an existing or future road or intersection conducted by an independent, multidisciplinary team. The El Paseo team included representatives from FHWA, the city of Las Cruces, Las Cruces Police Department, New Mexico Department of Transportation, Las Cruces RoadRUNNER Transit, and Las Cruces Municipal Planning Organization. The RSA's preliminary recommendations included improving crosswalks and sidewalks and reducing the number of driveways off of El Paseo. The recommendations are generally consistent with the comments from participants of both workshops.

Finally, the city also hosted a green infrastructure workshop in August 2010. The workshop, developed by the city of Las Cruces staff with EPA assistance, was for local design and engineering professionals, city staff, and decision-makers. The purpose was to present and educate participants in green infrastructure practices appropriate for an arid climate such as Las Cruces. The workshop preceded the El Paseo visioning workshop and complemented the visioning efforts by educating city staff about green infrastructure techniques, which allowed them to include a session about these techniques in the visioning workshops.

The Picturing El Paseo workshops and associated activities provided the city with a rich collection of images and written comments that city staff began to analyze in early 2011. City staff and leaders hope that El Paseo can one day return to being the heart of Las Cruces.

II. INTRODUCTION

The Public Involvement Plan and Toolkit provide a framework for meaningful public engagement and the outreach and participation strategies necessary to build trust, excitement, and support among Las Cruces residents for a city project or initiative. When done correctly, public involvement creates the opportunity for mutually equitable outcomes, growth that increases economic vitality, and environmental stewardship. These initiatives can result in a more equitable, environmentally responsible, and economically healthy Las Cruces that is appreciated by residents and visitors.

Successful public involvement means including all voices—the traditionally represented as well as underrepresented groups. Traditionally represented groups include politicians, developers, philanthropists, and voting constituencies who routinely participate in civic affairs. Underrepresented groups include those who have, for a variety of reasons, not participated. These groups might include people with limited mobility, the learning impaired, non-English speakers, those ineligible to vote, and the low income. These voices are important parts of a rich social dialogue and bringing them together can inform the planning process in ways that create more environmentally, economically, and socially sustainable outcomes for all participants.

Involving the community requires time and resources, but community involvement is worth the effort for several reasons:

- Incorporating substantive public input increases the likelihood that the public will support the project.
- Proactive public involvement can reduce or eliminate disputes by bringing public and stakeholder interests together at key project stages.
- The project can be improved by bringing an informed citizenry together with professionals.
- Development can be expedited with a clear mandate from the community.
- Trust is created between the city and the community.

The plan presented here outlines the necessary steps for establishing realistic goals, selecting appropriate outreach and participation strategies from the accompanying toolkit, evaluating the results, and sharing those results with the community.

III. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PLAN PROCESS

The process to develop a Public Involvement Plan involves six steps:

- 1. Ask the key questions.**
- 2. Set the goals and expected outcomes of public involvement.**
- 3. Develop outreach and participation for the Public Involvement Plan.**
- 4. Perform outreach and participation as outlined in your plan.**
- 5. Evaluate the results against plan goals and outcomes.**
- 6. Share the results.**

1. Ask the Key Questions

The first step asks four key questions. These questions determine if the plan should move forward. If the answer to any one of these questions is "no," then the city should change the plan to address concerns or determine if the plan should be cancelled.

The four key questions are:

- A. Do we have the right team?**
- B. Do we have the time?**
- C. Do we have the resources?**
- D. Does our plan meet legal requirements?**

A. Do we have the right team?

This plan is intended for all city of Las Cruces departments, since public involvement is not under any single department's purview. All city-led projects benefit from public involvement whether it is a redesign of a particular street, a new housing development, a new park project, or even a new budget process. Many projects and initiatives will benefit greatly from cross-departmental cooperation. The team, though led by a particular department, could also include staff from other departments that have an interest in the outcomes. This would not only improve communication among departments but also expand the participation of community stakeholders that traditionally may have only been involved in the activities of one specific department. A diversity of voices will ultimately produce richer results.

B. Do we have the time?

The time needed for a public involvement process can vary greatly. Typically, three months of outreach prior to the involvement activities (e.g. public workshops) will be enough time to raise awareness through the Internet and media and to engage community-based organizations and other interested parties.

C. Do we have the resources?

Sufficient resources are needed to put the PI Plan into action, including time and staff to develop the PI Plan, generate all materials needed, and perform the outreach and participation tasks. Tasks can be resource intensive, and a team of staff members or volunteers will probably be required.

Language considerations must be taken into account during the execution of the public involvement plan. All information should be available in both English and Spanish. Spanish-language information should be presented in the local dialect and use plain language free of technical jargon. Staff should consult with native speakers regarding each initiative governed by this plan to ensure that Spanish information adequately matches all English materials in content, form, and tone. In addition to producing materials in the two most commonly used languages in the area, the city should accommodate those who speak other languages. Showing the willingness to translate materials to make them more accessible will demonstrate to target audiences the city's commitment to engaging them, and they will hopefully appreciate the effort to communicate and be more interested in working with the city.

D. Does our plan meet legal requirements?

Regulations and laws at various levels of government affect public involvement, often requiring specific outreach activities or participation techniques. All legal requirements will need to be considered as the city implements the plan to create legally defensible processes. The following legal issues are among the requirements that the city might need to address, where appropriate, in the plan:

- Americans with Disabilities Act.
- National Environmental Policy Act.
- Federal Transportation Planning Requirements.
- Environmental Justice Requirements.
- Housing and Urban Development Requirements.
- State of New Mexico Open Meetings Act.
- State of New Mexico Inspection of Public Records.

2. Set Goals and Outcomes

Setting goals for the plan is important to determine the activities that comprise the plan and to evaluate the success of public involvement. The goals and desired outcomes should be defined in a document that all involved parties have a chance to review prior to involvement activities. If the goal is to create a community-driven design, an expected outcome would be substantive

public input to give to designers. Writing these expected outcomes down makes evaluating the involvement process after the plan has been completed much easier.

3. Develop Outreach and Participation Activities

After asking the key questions and setting the goals, the city would develop specific outreach and participation activities. Outreach and participation tools are described in the toolkit in Section IV. Outreach activities should be well defined and include details such as target audience, budgetary implications, and who is responsible for developing and distributing outreach materials or performing outreach activities. Participation activities should be described so they can be understood by the public and should include details such as step-by-step instructions to perform the activity, the results that will be generated, and how the results will be used. Describing the outreach and participation activities creates a work plan that will guide the project team and become part of the public record of the project. Additionally, defining public involvement activities in writing clearly lays out the city's commitment to involving the public.

4. Perform Outreach and Participation Activities

After the public involvement plan for the project or initiative is crafted, it should be reviewed and discussed by the project team—those who will actually perform the outreach and participation tasks. Team members need to be realistic in understanding the amount of work involved in producing the outreach materials, distributing these materials, developing participation, and facilitating participation exercises. Additionally, team members will benefit from occasionally taking a step back, looking at the big picture, and ensuring that they are honestly listening to other people.

5. Evaluate the Results

Upon completing the involvement activities, team members should evaluate the input received and the process used. The results of this evaluation can be as important as any input gathered, as the lessons learned can help improve subsequent plans.

A successful public involvement process may result in a great deal of public input, often gathered through multiple methods. This input needs to be carefully examined and summarized. Then the input should be shared with the public, allowing the public to “double check” the results. This step also maintains transparency in the involvement process. All input should be synthesized into a format that is clear and understandable to the public and to future staff and decision-makers to provide insight into the process used to gather it.

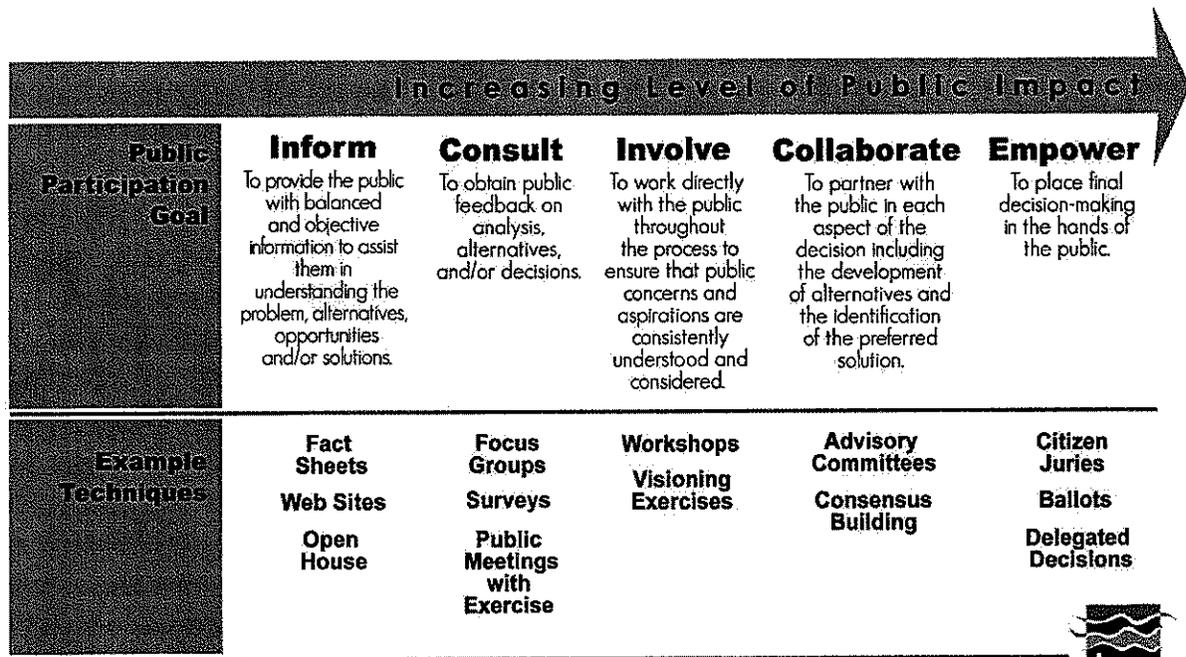
After synthesizing public input, the team should evaluate the entire public involvement process to identify lessons learned. This exercise will help the team determine which activities were most successful in meeting the goals. If the process and the results align with the expected outcomes and goals, the lessons learned can provide guidance for similar success in the future. If there is a disparity between outcomes and expectations or if goals were not met, then the city should consider how future attempts at similar involvement could be modified. Furthermore, even if outcomes are not what were expected, sharing this fact can build public trust by demonstrating that the city values honest, transparent communication and not just results.

7. Share the Results

As with all aspects of the public involvement plan, the performance evaluation should be well documented. By writing documents that describe the processes, the results, and the evaluation of those results and processes, the city creates a public record for each initiative. This public record helps staff look back on the process and understand the effort involved, the benefits realized, and the lessons learned. The documents also allow all members of the community to share in the project's success and facilitates public dialogue about the results of public involvement processes. The city can keep two-way communication open after sharing the results to give the public avenues to comment on these results. Comments regarding the results can steer decision-making, gauge public sentiment, and develop buy-in from stakeholder groups, other city departments, and the public.

Tailoring the Public Involvement Plan to a Project

To tailor this plan to a specific project, the team needs to determine what level of involvement is needed and set the goals accordingly. The goals outlined for the plan will drive the outreach and participation tools described in Section IV. Outreach requires identifying target audiences and specific strategies to reach these audiences. In participation, the techniques will change depending on the type and level of participation needed to develop the input the project needs. The Public Participation Spectrum (Figure 1) can be used to determine the level and type of involvement for the project. The spectrum can be used as a sliding scale of public involvement that starts with basic involvement that simply informs and goes up to empowering the public to make decisions. A particular project will fall somewhere on this scale, and the team can "slide" the outreach and participation activities to meet the needs of the project or initiative.



Specific tools for Outreach and Participation are outlined in the Toolkit.



Figure 1. International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) Public Participation Spectrum (<http://www.iap2.org/>)

Summary

This public involvement plan process provides specific methods to reach out to and involve the public in municipal actions. This engagement allows interested parties to learn about and influence decisions that affect their community. Decision-makers can use the public involvement process to gauge public sentiment and gather helpful input for current and proposed policies and projects. The community has a better chance of reaching equitable outcomes when all parties are involved, informed, and included in decision-making. By using this tool for decision-making, a community can make decisions that balance economic vitality, equity among citizens, and environmental stewardship. By honestly and earnestly seeking to incorporate public aspirations, advice, concerns, and considerations, the city of Las Cruces creates a great opportunity to move forward in the best interest of all community members.

IV. TOOLKIT

1. Introduction

The toolkit contains outreach and participation tools the city could use in their involvement process. Like any tool used to repair or build something, the tools described in this section are designed to be used in concert with one another to accomplish the goals and objectives established for a particular public involvement effort. The toolkit includes:

- **Outreach tools** to inform and engage all segments of the population, including those who may be affected by an initiative, the general population, and those who have traditionally been underrepresented.
- **Participation tools** to create and document useful input.

Certain tools will prove widely useful and could be used frequently on multiple projects or on iterative efforts. Other, more specialized tools may not get used as often but are available in this toolkit should they be needed. As work moves forward, new tools may be needed to perform a specific function. These tools can be added to the toolkit using the New Tool Worksheet in Appendix B.

Upon completion of any public outreach or involvement effort, city staff should write a summary memo that documents and analyzes comments received. The memo should also document the tools used and the success of those tools in achieving the effort's goals. Lessons learned will help with subsequent outreach and involvement activities. To assist in evaluation efforts, the team can use the Evaluation Worksheet in Appendix B.

Finally, staff availability is crucial to the success of any outreach and participation efforts. As noted in Section III, a cross-departmental project team should be established at the beginning of any effort. On that team should be a primary staff contact who responds to public inquiries and forwards correspondence to the appropriate project team member for timely response.

2. Outreach Tools

Outreach tools help connect staff and elected officials with audiences to develop awareness of and participation in the project under consideration. These tools also provide basic project information and direct interested parties to additional resources that give more information. In general, implementing as many of these tools as possible will provide more information to the community about a project and the opportunities to become involved. Outreach should be two-pronged—focused outreach to specific residents and stakeholders whose input is needed for an

inclusive involvement and more general outreach to reach a broader audience. Focused outreach involves city staff going out into the community—reaching the businesses, religious institutions, schools, and social clubs of those residents who have, for any number of reasons, not been engaged in city planning and policy efforts. Involvement strategies to reach a broader audience include more traditional media campaigns (e.g., flyers, posters, websites, or radio spots) but also social media such as Facebook and Twitter. Although the “more is better” approach may be tempered by time and budget constraints, the city should go straight to the people to involve them.

A. Project Announcement

A project announcement is a simple, one-page description of the effort that the city is undertaking. It tells readers who is involved, what the project is, where and when it is happening, and how the process will work. It is developed in print and digital formats and released to the public, businesses, institutions, agencies, and members of the community who are targeted for outreach. The announcement should be translated into the predominant languages of the community. In print format, the announcement may take the form of a flyer, bulk mail piece, or poster. The digital format can be an image file or a PDF that is uploaded to a relevant website, used in social media, or sent by e-newsletter. Costs may be higher if the city uses professional graphic design, certain distribution methods, or multiple distribution methods.

B. Partnerships with Community-Based Organizations

Community-based organizations (CBOs) are groups that serve a broad range of community interests. Organizations include senior centers; civic groups; business organizations; churches and other faith-based organizations; service clubs; schools that provide English as a second language programs; service providers for youths, families, and persons with disabilities; and many others.

Community-based organizations provide the opportunity to connect with specific audiences and are an integral part of identifying and reaching out to underrepresented groups. The city can reach out to specific organizations to provide these groups with project information and encourage them to become involved. Should these groups have specific needs that might affect the involvement process, the city should clearly outline strategies to meet those needs. For example, organizations that represent people whose first language is not English should be invited to participate in exercises where they can receive information and provide input in the language with which they are most comfortable. Often, the organization can provide the venue and opportunity to meet with the group and perform a participation tool exercise, such as a coffee circle (described in the Participation Tools section).

C. School Partnerships

School administrations can publish information in school websites or newsletters or send email to distribution lists to engage students and their parents. Outreach activities can also be integrated into school curricula to inform students about a project through activities such as learning games and field trips. In high school, educators can create modules for classes and clubs involved in activities such as photography, computer science, art, civics, or creative writing. For instance, if the city of Las Cruces is undertaking a planning effort for a particular neighborhood, students of the local school could undertake a history project documenting the neighborhood. Or a multimedia class could produce short films documenting a “day in the life” of neighborhood residents.

D. Project Website

A project-specific website gives detailed and extensive information and allows for two-way communication. It should complement, not replace, other outreach and involvement efforts, since many people do not have access to the Internet or do not use it frequently. The website can stand alone or could be integrated into the city’s existing website. If possible, the city should use an intuitive URL, such as [www.\[project name\].org](http://www.[project name].org) or [www.\[city name\].gov/\[project name\]](http://www.[city name].gov/[project name]). Websites should be easy to access and to navigate and have translations available in Spanish or other appropriate languages.

E. Social Media

Social media and social networking websites include Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and blogs. For any initiative, the city could create a social media strategy and invite target audiences (identified using city email lists or previously interested groups) to participate. It is important to choose the social media and networking platforms that have the best chance of reaching the intended audience. If the medium allows for public commenting, the project team should moderate those comments to ensure content is appropriate.

F. Electronic Newsletters

Email newsletters quickly and easily disseminate information to contact lists. While e-newsletters can be inexpensive if sent electronically through a listserv, an e-newsletter service may provide a more attractive-looking and engaging newsletter, but at an increased cost.

G. Media Campaign

A comprehensive regional media campaign often is the primary source of outreach to the broader community. A media campaign might include press releases, public service announcements, press conferences, feature articles, or interviews, depending on the nature of the project and the resources available. To ensure media exposure, the city could buy advertisements but should do so strategically to keep costs low. Keeping a consistent media message across all channels requires generating and distributing talking points to project team members.

3. Participation Tools

Participation tools are designed to create a meaningful dialogue between city staff and the community. Each participation tool is a structured activity that allows participants to learn about the project, ask questions, and provide comments. The input that is generated in participation activities can be used for analysis, and create buy-in for a project. Similar to outreach tools, participation tools can be used in combination with one another to elicit input from target audiences through multiple avenues, which is especially useful when participation is desired from several different groups in a community.

The first set of participation tools described in this section focus on face-to-face meetings, with a particular emphasis on city staff going to places where a particular population already gathers. This effort pays off by demonstrating that city staff is committed to hearing the concerns of those groups who do not participate in more conventional public processes such as larger community meeting and workshops. These tools include ones that help participants create a vision for their community. Several of the visioning tools use pictures to tell a story. Using images is not only more fun for participants, but also more inclusive and equitable in that it relies less on words to express ideas and concerns. This technique is most helpful when working with community members who might not speak or read English well or with children and young people who find images more exciting than words.

The project website and social media described in the outreach section remain pertinent to participation efforts. A project-specific website can be used to disseminate information and gather comments. Additionally, social media websites can allow people to create and exchange content about a specific topic. Again, a major caveat is that not everyone has access to or the ability to use the Internet, so online tools should complement, nor replace, face-to-face participation tools.

A. Meeting with the Public

The term “meeting with the public” is used deliberately to differentiate from “public meeting.” Meeting with the public means actively going into the community, talking with community members about a particular city initiative, and most importantly, *listening* to their concerns. Though potentially staff intensive, the time committed to informal meetings can build a significant amount of trust with the community. Feedback is likely to be more candid since staff is on the residents’ “turf,” and people can discuss their concerns in conversation rather than having to speak in front of a large group, which many people find intimidating. Furthermore, community members may feel more engaged in the process and thus be more willing to attend larger, traditional-format community meetings and workshops.

Meetings with Community-Based Organization – As described in Section III, community-based organizations include senior centers, civic groups, business organizations, churches, service clubs, and others. Community-based organizations often host meetings that provide an opportunity for city staff to discuss particular city initiatives and projects. Meeting with groups at their regularly scheduled meeting times and in their format demonstrates a willingness to work with the group to listen and understand their position.

Coffee Circles – A coffee circle is a small meeting with a specific group, generally in an informal setting such as a person’s home, a business, or a community center. To generate conversation, the facilitator can start by asking engaging questions such as “What was it like here when you were growing up?” or “Where is your favorite place in town to spend time, and why?” Once the conversation is flowing, the facilitator can get into the specifics of the project.

World Café – A world café is a specialized technique using a leaderless dialogue that simulates café-style conversation, where small groups engage in conversation to explore a given topic. To set up the meeting space, tables are placed around the room, each one accommodating four to six people. A host is stationed at each table to listen, take notes, and facilitate discussion, not to lead the group discussion. Each group should discuss the topic, listen to each other’s viewpoints, and share their views. Participants switch tables periodically, while each host remains, allowing ideas to move around the room.

See: <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/support/lib/knowledgesharing/meetings.htm>

B. Public Meetings

More conventional meeting formats are described below. At all meetings, staff should provide sign-in sheets and comment cards. In addition to comment cards, participants could be asked to

fill out a card at the beginning of the meeting stating their concerns and motivation for attending the meeting. This is their “declarative statement.” These cards could be posted on a bulletin board so others can read them. At the conclusion of the meeting, participants would be asked to revisit the cards and fill out the other side with “what they heard” and if their opinion on issues has changed. This before-and-after response will help city staff gauge how effective their messaging has been and where there is room for improvement.

Community Meeting – The community meeting is a structured meeting with an agenda during which the project team conveys information, listens to comments, and answers questions. It may include a formal presentation, a question-and-answer session, and an informal discussion period.

Open House Meeting – An open house meeting provides more opportunities for the project team and public to interact informally. An open house uses information stations staffed by project team members, allowing the public to talk with those involved in the project to learn more and provide input. This type of format is useful to gather input from participants who may not feel comfortable speaking in front of a group. It is good practice to have two team members at each station so one can focus on speaking with participants while the other records input.

Workshop – Workshops engage the public in interactive exercises to develop ideas and input. Workshops provide a venue for discussions of goals and alternatives, as well as creative problem-solving. Activities chosen for a workshop depend on the demographics of the group and what kinds of responses the staff hopes to elicit.

Design Charrette – A charrette, as best described by the National Charrette Institute, is a collaborative design event that lasts a minimum of 4-days. A multidisciplinary charrette team, consisting of consultants and sponsor staff, produces the plan. Stakeholders—those being anyone who can approve, promote or block the project as well as anyone directly affected by the outcomes—are involved through a series of short feedback loops or meetings. Most stakeholders attend two or three feedback meetings at critical decision-making points during the charrette. These feedback loops provide the charrette team with the information necessary to create a feasible plan. Just as importantly, they allow the stakeholders to become co-authors of the plan so that they are more likely to support and implement it. Charrettes take place in a charrette studio situated on or near the project site. The charrette team first conducts an open public meeting to solicit the values, vision, and needs of the stakeholders. The team then breaks off to create alternative plans or scenarios, which are presented in a second public meeting usually a day or two later. The team then synthesizes the best aspects of the alternatives into a preferred plan that is developed in detail and tested for economic, design and political feasibility. The charrette concludes with a comprehensive presentation at a final public meeting.

See: <http://www.charretteinstitute.org/>

Expert Panels – An expert panel is a public meeting that mimics the “Meet the Press” format. A panel of media representatives or a facilitator interviews experts to show an issue from different perspectives. A neutral facilitator ensures a balanced discussion. The public can be involved in a question-and answer-session following the panel.

Focus Groups – Focus groups are a message-testing forum with selected members of a target audience. Testers show these individuals messages and interview them to gauge their reaction to those messages.

Fishbowl – A fishbowl is a small group of people, generally between five to eight individuals, seated in a circle, having a conversation in full view of a larger audience. The fishbowl is most often an open discussion, with public officials, decision-makers, or stakeholders taking “permanent” chairs at the table, with several chairs open to members of the audience who want to sit down and discuss an issue. Audience members can move to the central table as issues are discussed and when the discussion moves to another issue, that individual returns to the audience, opening a chair for someone else. This format allows the public to participate in a conversation that can answer questions and aid in understanding the decision-making process, especially where controversial or “hot button” issues are concerned. While significant moderation is not needed, a facilitator may help the discussion progress smoothly.

See: <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/support/lib/knowledgesharing/meetings.htm>

Webinar – A webinar is a meeting that is presented online. Currently, technology allows for public meeting “webcasting,” or broadcasting via the Internet, and two-way electronic communication. While webcasting can be relatively simple, participatory techniques are difficult to implement in a webinar format. As technology improves, webinars may emerge as an increasingly useful tool.

C. Visioning

Visioning exercises can take several forms and can be incorporated into the meeting formats previously listed. Visioning tools can be used to solicit public ideas in the initial stages or to help shape components of the project as it evolves. At each stage, if the results of the visioning process are shared with the public for ongoing feedback, the public is reassured that their input shapes the community vision to the greatest degree possible. Visioning performed early and throughout the life of the project helps ensure that the public vision is realized as the project moves through the municipal decision-making process towards implementation. Material gathered can be synthesized in various ways, which will depend largely on the anticipated use of

the input when the exercise is designed. All input should be treated equally and collected in such a way that the public involvement process moves forward and is informed by this input. The input should include a detailed explanation of the visioning exercise that aided its development.

Shared Perspectives – A shared perspective exercise uses a photograph or image of an existing condition and an overlay sheet of trace paper on which an artist can draw. The artist or another member of the team talks with a participant about the particular issues illustrated in the photos and elicits ideas about what the participant would like to see there instead. The artist captures these ideas immediately and draws them on the trace paper on top of the photograph in front of the participant. In essence, the artist is serving as the hands for the participant. This type of activity generates a lot of excitement, and participants can be invited to do their own drawings if they want. The result is a rich set of images that can be categorized according to common visions that emerge and discussed afterwards in a meeting of all participants.

Mapping Exercise – A mapping exercise uses a map or aerial photograph to help develop input regarding a specific geographic area, location, or corridor. The input can be free flowing and cover a range of topics, or it can be targeted to gather input on a specific topic, idea, or issue. In cases where a discussion of alternatives is part of the process, two alternative maps can be used to develop input. Mapping exercises can be performed in various ways. One way involves printing large maps and encouraging the public to draw or write their ideas on the maps themselves. This input can then be scanned, photographed, or catalogued. A facilitator is present to explain the map, answer questions, guide input gathering, and keep the discussion focused. Some participants may have difficulty reading maps at first, so it is helpful to have printed eye-level photographs of places depicted in the map to help participants get their bearings. Another method is to ask participants to draw their own maps based on their knowledge of the area of interest. These maps, though likely crudely drawn, can be valuable in highlighting how the participant experiences the area.

Photovoice – Photovoice is a participation tool developed at the University of Michigan. The underlying principles are that that images teach, and pictures can influence policy. It is a facilitated process where participants use photographs to explain how they perceive their current circumstances and also explain what they like and do not like. Pictures can be collected through a variety of means; participants can bring their own photos to a workshop event or upload photos to the project website prior to an event for city staff to print. Another method is distributing disposable digital cameras before the event; staff can download the images at the meeting and print the photos on site. Alternatively, staff could distribute cameras at the event and take participants on a tour of a project area, allowing them to note their likes and dislikes with pictures rather than words. The “comments” gathered through Photovoice are images that are assembled by participants (with assistance from a facilitator) into collages. These images can be

presented as a public art display to generate community awareness of issues, to create a collage or educational tool, or to generate a lively discussion.

See: <http://heb.sagepub.com/content/24/3/369.short>

Visual Preference Survey – In a visual preference survey, participants look at two pictures of a similar place or element—e.g. a street with on-street parking versus a street without parking, or an stream with a pathway along it versus one without a path that looks more natural. Participants are then asked to select which image they prefer. Surveys can be taken on computers or using display boards and a ballot sheet. Public feedback developed through the visual preference survey is most helpful in determining public opinion related design aesthetics.

Computer Simulations – Computer simulations are an increasingly useful visioning tool in helping the public understand choices, see possible future scenarios, or see how their input may be used. At a basic level, a computer simulation is similar to the shared perspective exercise in showing simple before-and-after representations of how a project might look when complete based on participant comments. Simulations are developed by a professional graphic designer or architectural renderer and can be time-intensive, depending upon the desired quality of the final image. The most basic image looks like a photographic collage. This exercise therefore is best suited to a multi-day charrette where participants can see the image or images evolve over the course of the event. Typically, the designer will take these images back to his or her office to create a more realistic image.

Keypad Polling – Keypad polling is where participants use handheld remote devices that allow them to vote on polling questions at a public meeting. The exercise is included in the visioning section because the results of the polling are shown immediately on a screen. The facilitator uses the outcomes to guide discussion. Polling is anonymous so those who do not feel comfortable publicly voicing their opinions can still share their thoughts.

D. Tours and Audits

Tours are facilitated group excursions that help participants familiarize themselves with a project area. Audits are similar but involve developing inventories to provide quantifiable data regarding the typical public experience. Both activities have city staff, designers, officials, and community participants walking through their community to identify issues that affect the public. Although participants may feel that they are already familiar with the study area, a facilitated tour or audit helps them see the area with a new perspective. Walking tours are most helpful when a study area is relatively compact or when a workshop's goal is assessing the pedestrian experience of a street or neighborhood. For large study areas, vans or buses may be needed.

E. Simulation Games

Simulation games are exercises that lay out a set of real or hypothetical conditions and ask participants to simulate a decision based on those conditions. While these games may be resource intensive to develop and test, simulation can be an effective participatory technique.

Budget Exercise – The budget exercise is a method to develop a vision while working with budgetary constraints. The exercise gives participants hypothetical amount of money and asks them to choose how to spend the money. This exercise encourages people to prioritize wants and needs in a scenario that mimics what decision-makers face. The budget exercise can be performed in various ways, generally dictated by the meeting and the initiative. When possible, budgetary constraints and alternatives or choices should mimic the applicable scenario facing decision-makers. The budget exercise can use a worksheet, or a Monopoly-style game, representing budget dollars. The budgets created in this exercise will help project organizers better understand public priorities and spending concerns. These conclusions should be documented for later reference to substantiate decisions that might be made about the project.

Wikipanning — Wikipanning offers an integrated approach using technologies that are increasingly available to the public. Using the Wikipanning tools, residents are invited to log into their community's project website and then are led through a series of activities throughout the project life. These activities include a mix of project-specific, multimedia learning sessions, online chats, message boards, surveys, and podcasts offering walking tours through the project's principal sites. Although some sessions, like chats, would occur in real-time, most activities can be arranged around participants' schedules.

See: <http://www.wikipanning.org/index.php?P=virtualcharrette>

V. Appendices

Appendix A – EPA’s Smart Growth Implementation Assistance (SGIA) Program

Appendix B – Picturing El Paseo Photobook

Appendix C– Worksheets

- Evaluation Worksheet
- New Tool Worksheet

Appendix A

EPA's Smart Growth Implementation Assistance Program (SGIA)

Communities around the country want to foster economic growth, protect environmental resources, and plan for development. In many cases they need additional tools, resources or information to achieve these goals. In response to this need the Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Sustainable Communities launched the Smart Growth Implementation Assistance Program in 2005 to provide technical assistance through contractor services to selected communities. EPA assembles teams of specialized consultants, bringing together expertise that meets a particular community's needs. While working with community participants to understand their aspiration for development, the teams bring experience from working in other parts of the country to provide best practices for consideration by the assisted community. The goal of the program is to help participating communities attain their goals, while also producing a resource (such as a report or set of guidelines) that can be useful to a broad range of communities facing similar challenges.

The Smart Growth Implementation Assistance Program is designed to help communities achieve growth that supports economic, community and environmental goals. People in communities around the country are frustrated by development that gives them no choice about driving long distances between where they live, work and shop; that require costly expenditures to extend sewers, roads and public services to support new development; that uses up natural areas and farmland for development while land and buildings lie empty in already developed areas; and that makes it difficult for working people to rent or buy a home because of development that focuses only on one or two costly housing types. Smart growth strategies create new neighborhoods and maintain existing ones that are attractive, convenient, safe and healthy. They foster design that encourages social, civic and physical activity. They protect the environment while stimulating economic growth. Most of all, they create more choices for residents, workers, visitors, children, families, single people, and older adults—choices in where to live, how to get around, and how to interact with the people around them. When communities undertake this kind of planning, they preserve the best of the past while creating a bright future for generations to come.

More information about the program, including information on how to apply and links to reports from past recipients can be found at <http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/sgia.htm>.

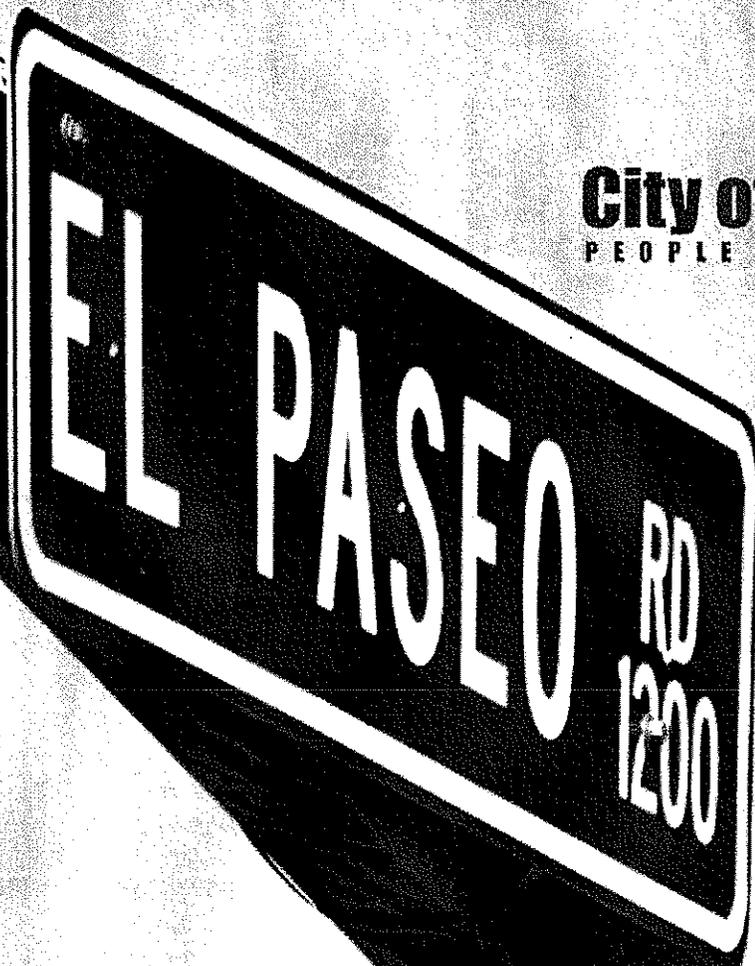
PHOTOBOOK

Visioning Workshop #1

October 1 & October 2, 2010



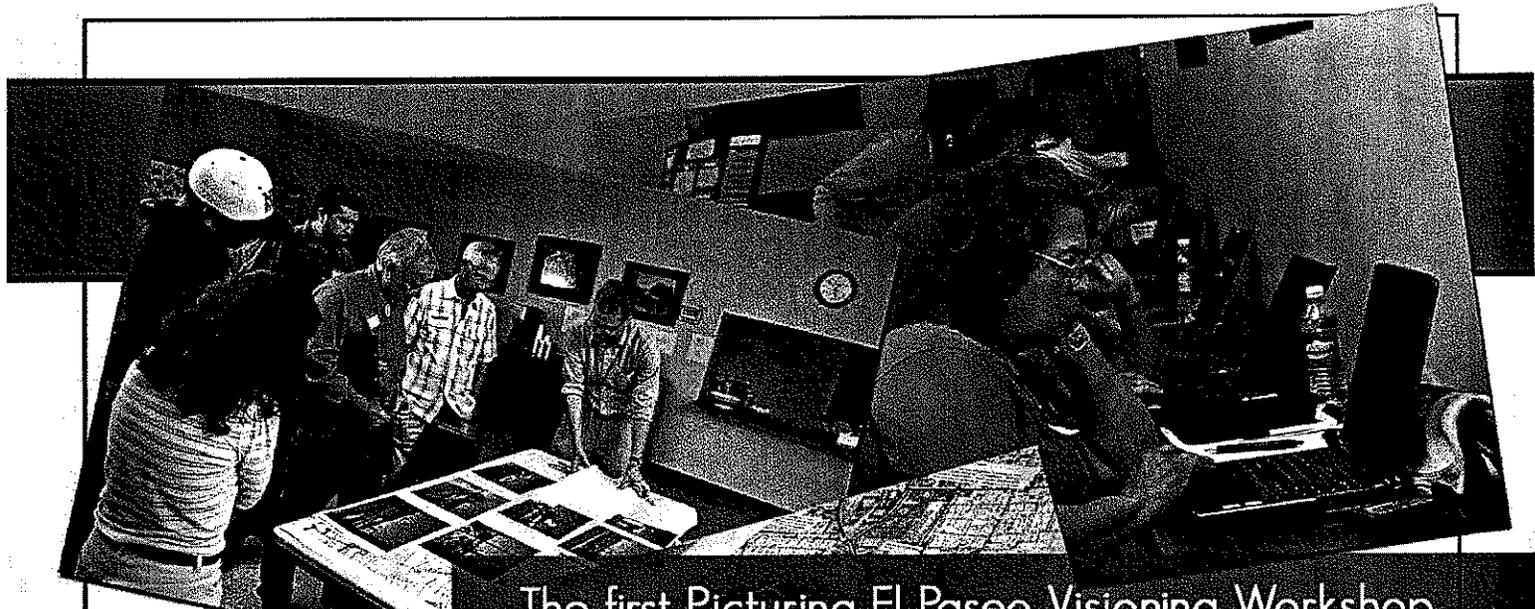
City of Las Cruces
PEOPLE HELPING PEOPLE



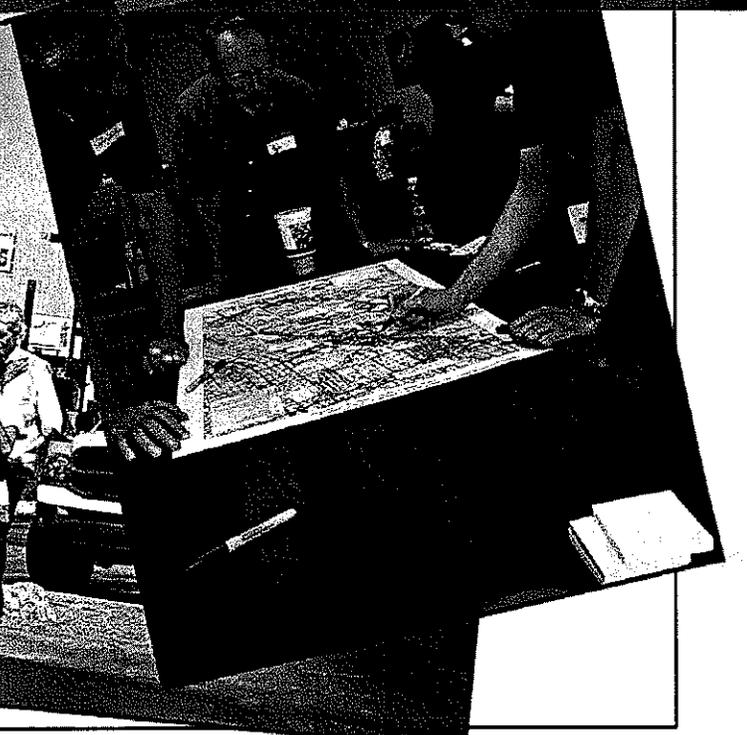
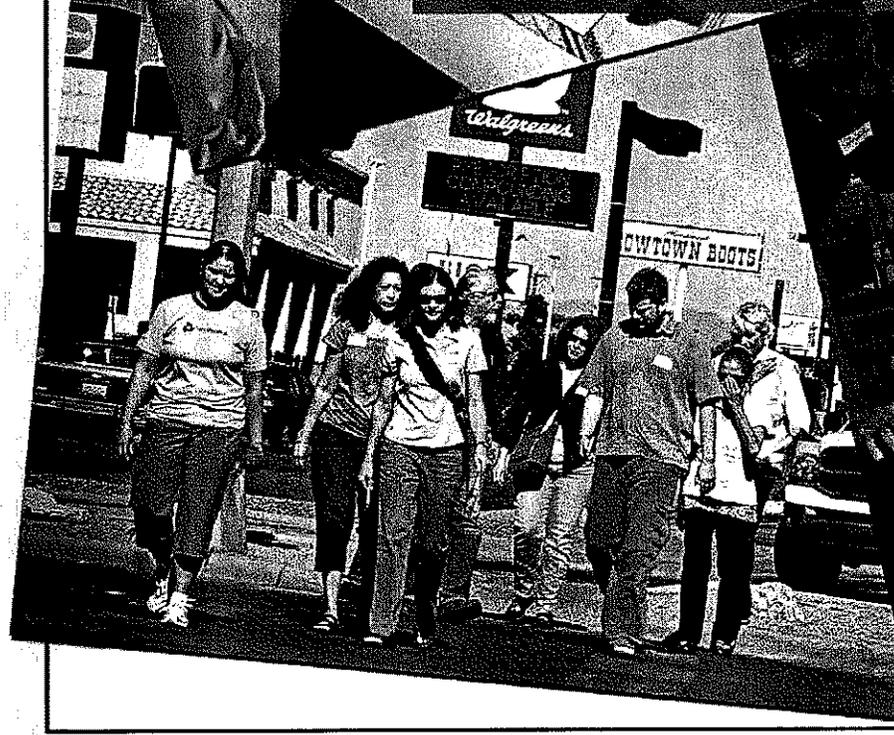
PICTURING

el **Paseo**

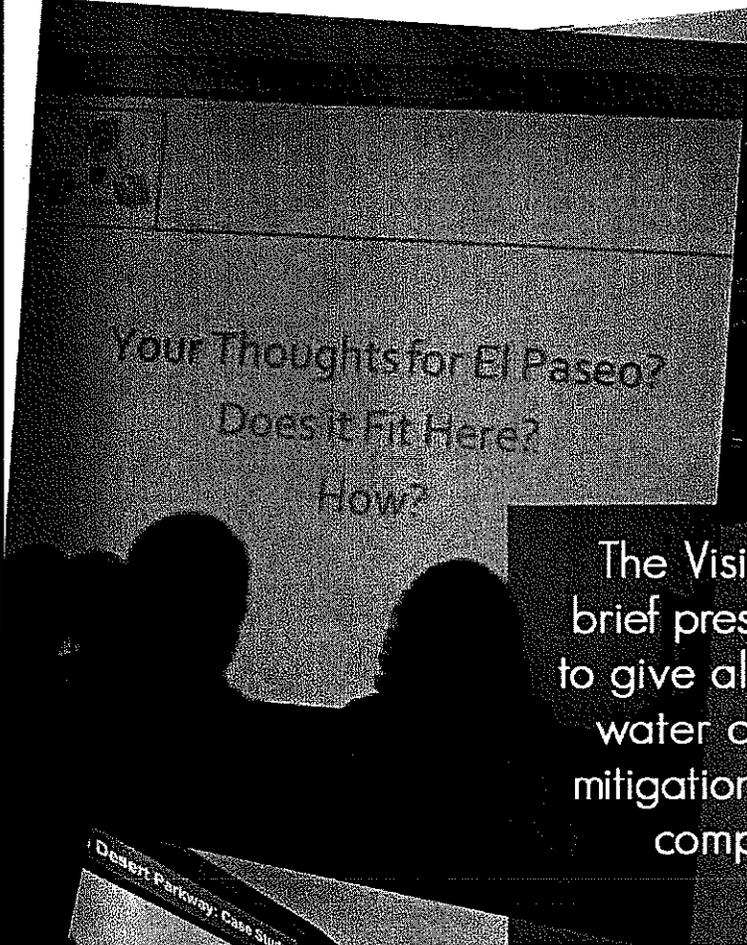
sharing your vision for the corridor



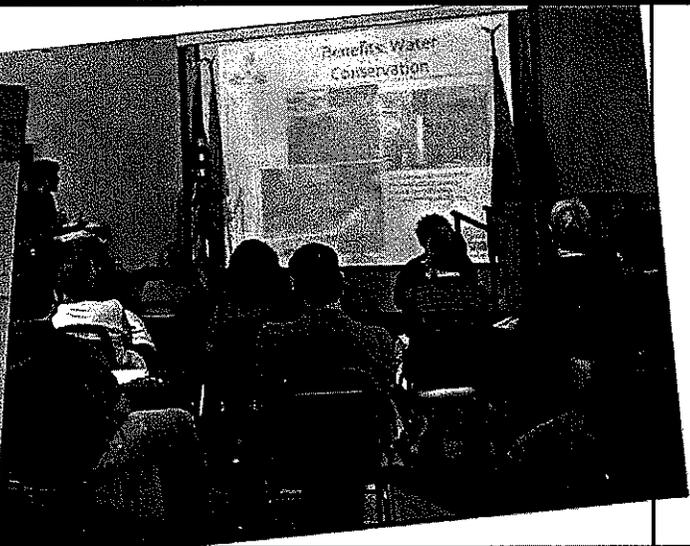
The first Picturing El Paseo Visioning Workshop was held October 1st and 2nd, 2010. The two-day workshop series featured four structured workshop sessions attended by representatives of the community and community organizations. The focus of this workshop was to introduce and test public involvement techniques to involve local residents, students, businesses, and organizations in the Picturing El Paseo project in preparation for a larger public workshop in November.



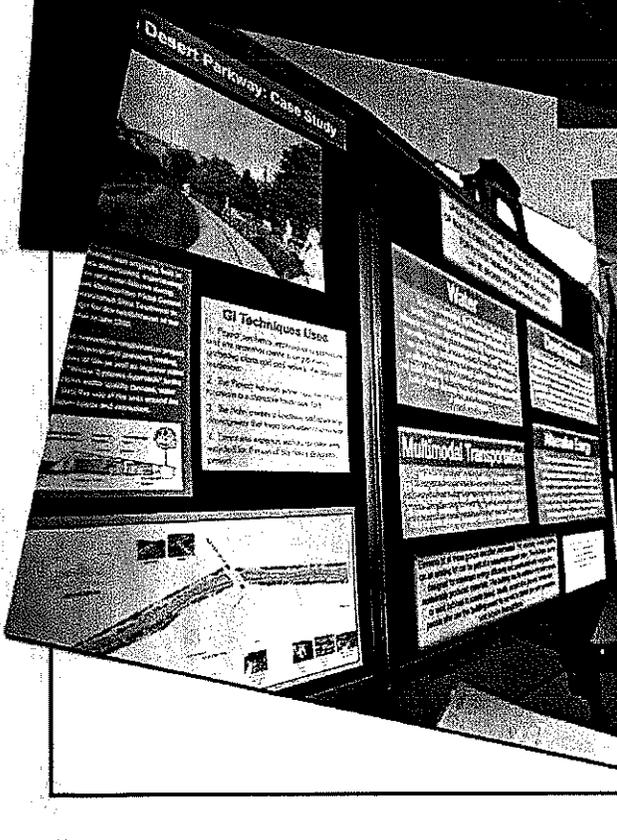
Green Infrastructure



Your Thoughts for El Paseo?
Does it Fit Here?
How?



The Visioning Workshop began with a brief presentation on green infrastructure to give all participants ideas about how water conservation, heat island effect mitigation, and other green infrastructure components could be considered in their vision of El Paseo.



Desert Parkway - Case Study

GI Techniques Used

1. Plant species appropriate to the site and region to reduce water consumption and provide habitat for native species.
2. Use native plants to reduce water consumption and provide habitat for native species.
3. Use native plants to reduce water consumption and provide habitat for native species.
4. Use native plants to reduce water consumption and provide habitat for native species.

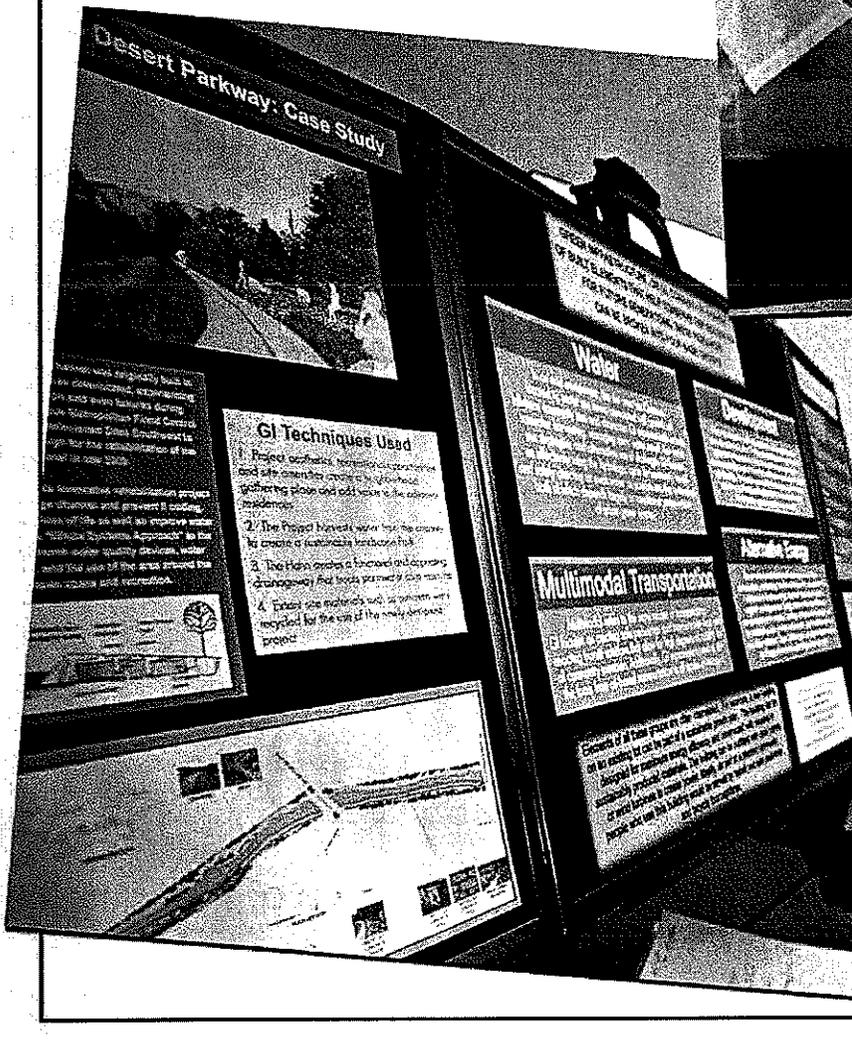
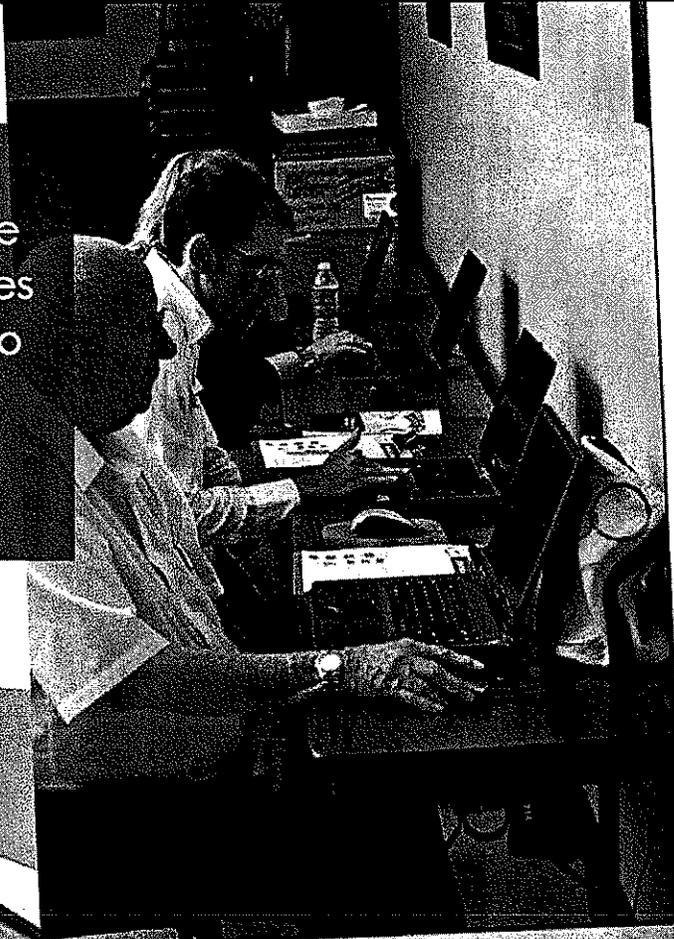
Multimodal Transportation

Encourage the use of public transit, walking, and bicycling to reduce the number of cars on the road and improve air quality.

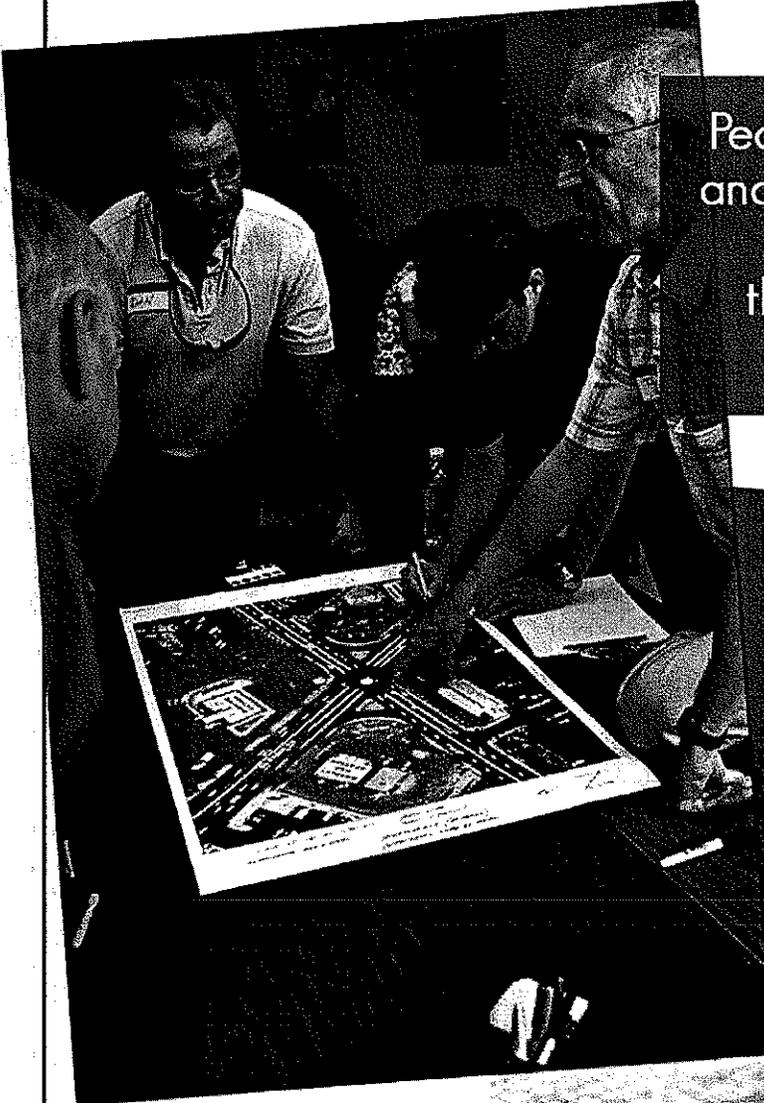


Visual Preference Survey

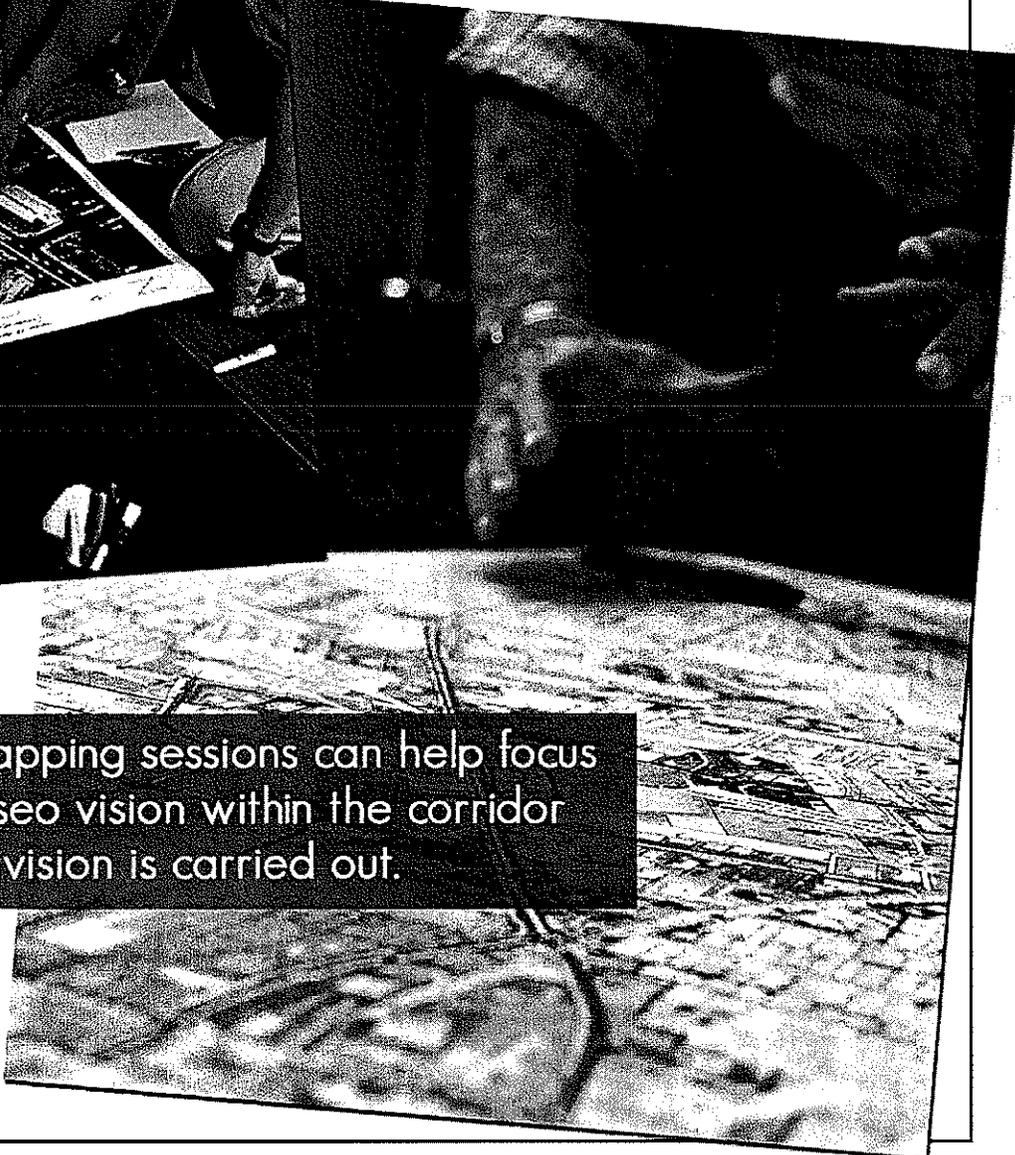
More green infrastructure information was made available on display boards, and attendees took a visual preference survey to determine what kind of landscaping is appropriate for the El Paseo Corridor.



Mapping

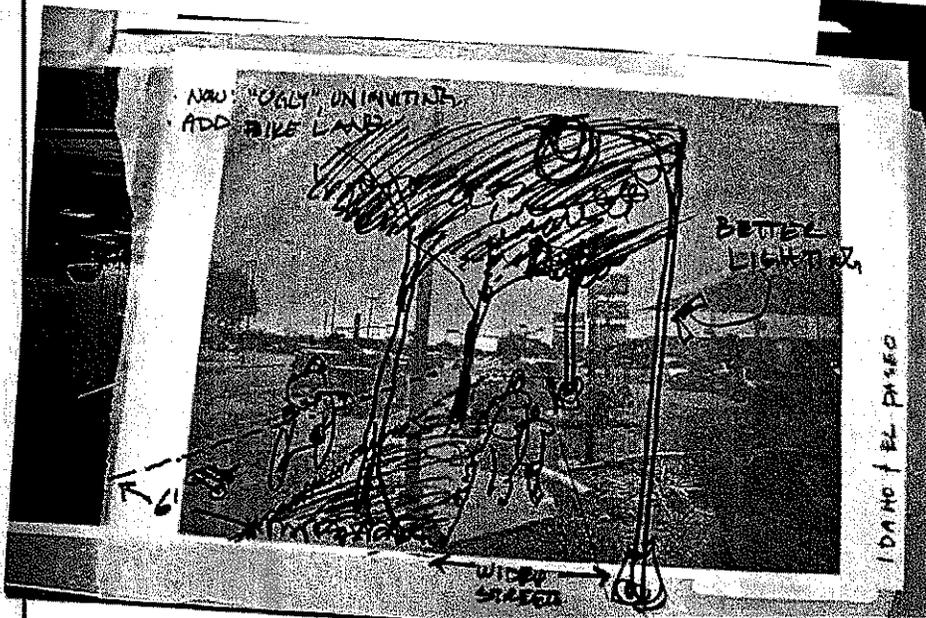


People were encouraged to write and draw on maps of the corridor area to spark problem-solving thought processes and generate ideas through discussion.

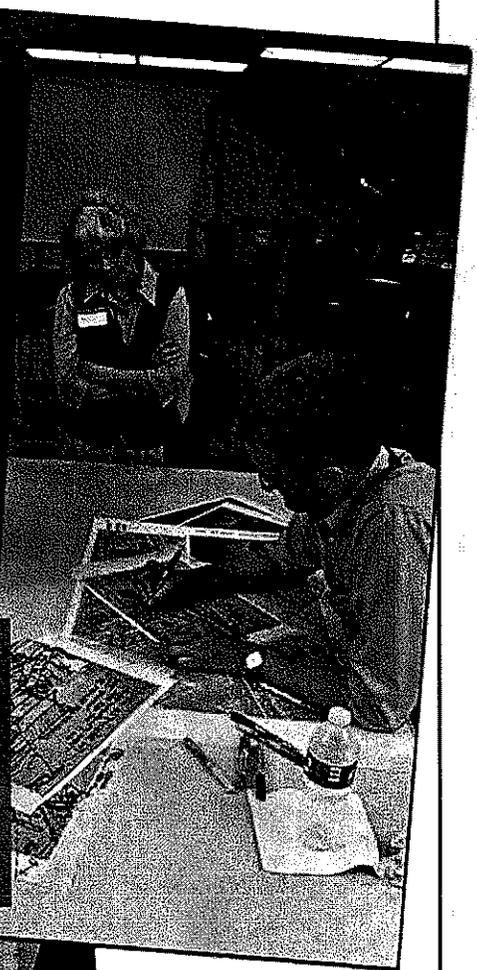


Results of these mapping sessions can help focus the Picturing El Paseo vision within the corridor or shape how the vision is carried out.

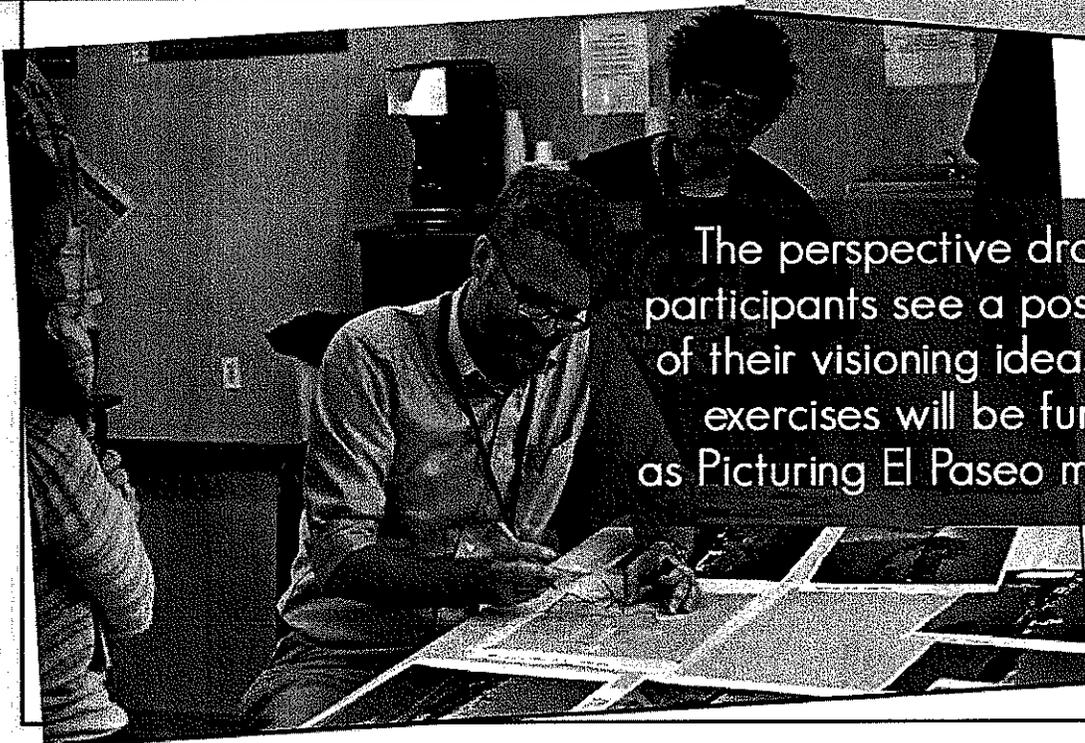
Shared Perspectives



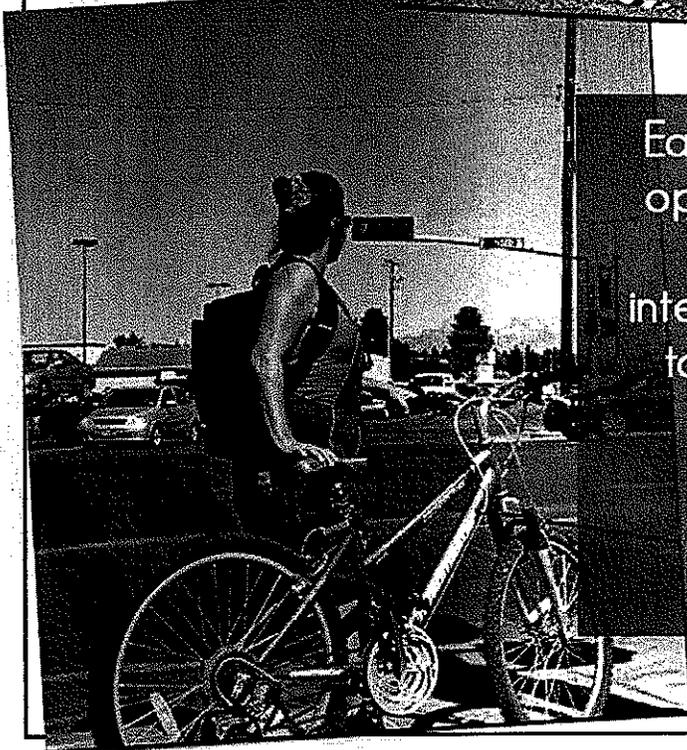
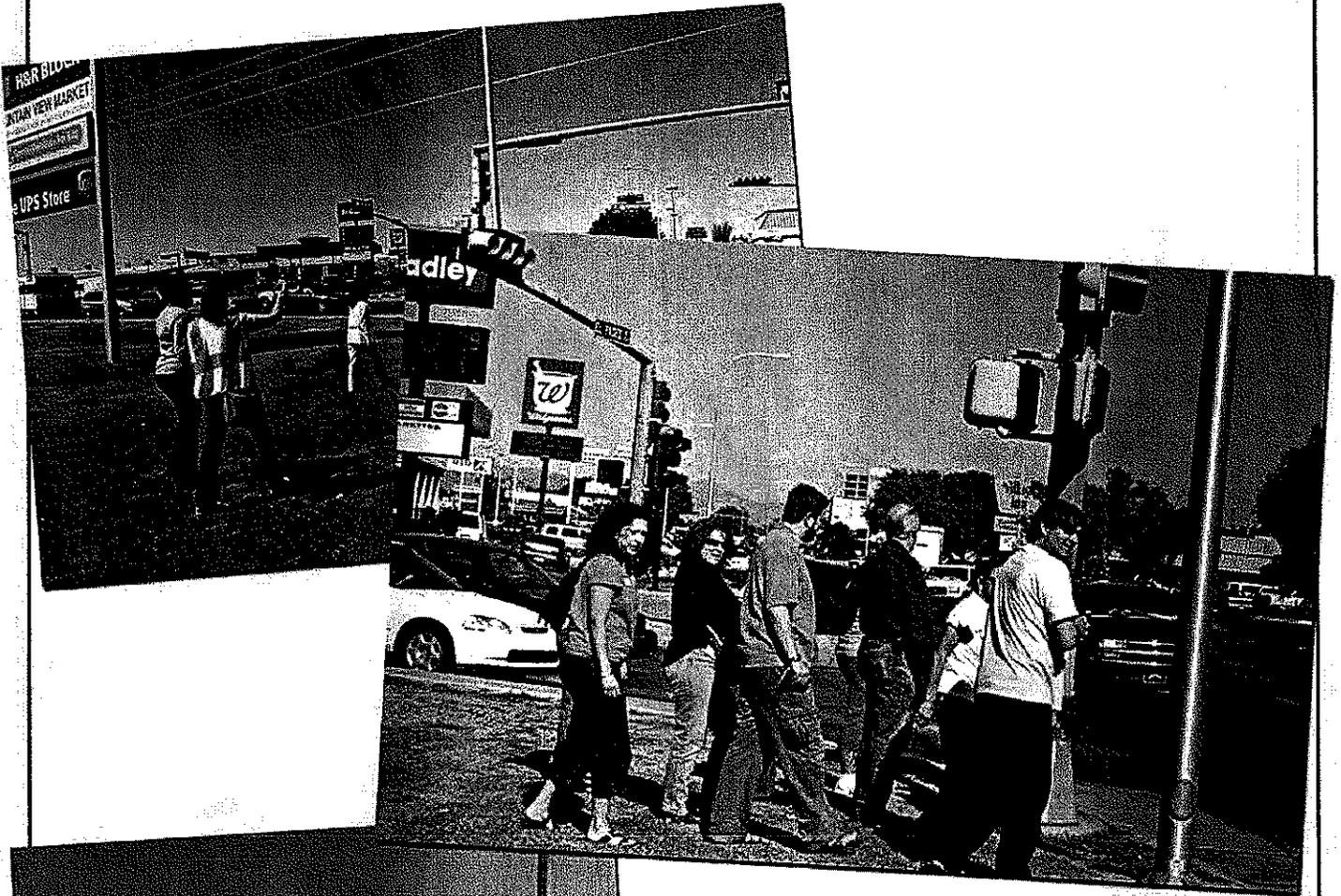
As part of the mapping exercise, perspective drawings were created by a project team member. These drawings were overlaid on photographs of the El Paseo corridor.



The perspective drawings helped participants see a possible outcome of their visioning ideas. These visual exercises will be further explored as Picturing El Paseo moves forward.

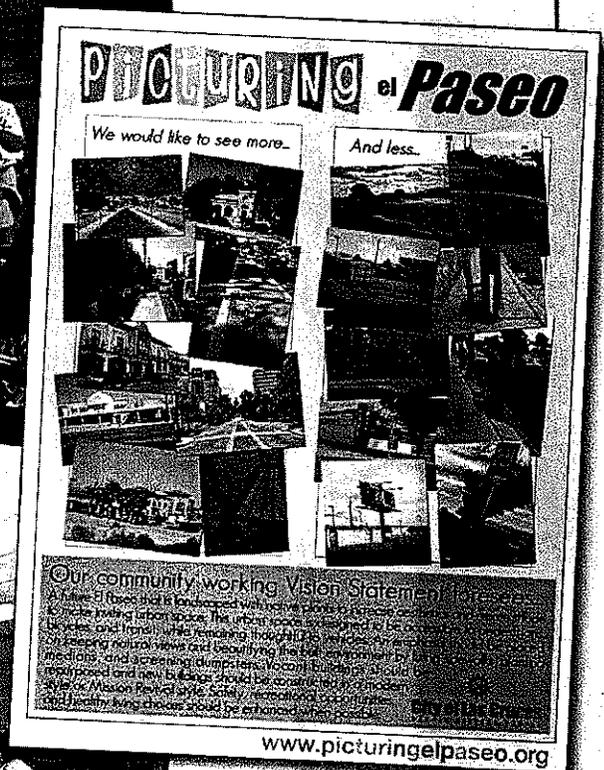


Site Tour



Each workshop session provided the opportunity for people to visit the El Paseo Road and Idaho Avenue intersection. Participants who wanted to get the feel for the walkability of the roadway were encouraged to safely walk along and across the street and record their feelings of comfort and safety.

Feedback Session



Each session included a feedback session, which was recorded for further, more detailed study. Participants learned about the Picturing El Paseo Photovoice exercise and were encouraged to give feedback about how photos can be used to create a community-based snapshot of the El Paseo corridor to effectively guide decision makers and redevelopment. This feedback is currently being used to refine public involvement techniques as Picturing El Paseo moves forward.

EVALUATION WORKSHEET

Project Name:

Public involvement goals:

Did the plans meet the goals? Yes No

Please explain how:

Expected outcomes:

Did the project meet outcomes? Yes No

Please explain how:

What lessons learned can be used on future projects?

NEW TOOL WORKSHEET

Tool Name: _____

Tool overview and application:

Comment gathering:

Key points for using this tool:

Tool benefits:

Project(s) where tool has been used:
