

Envision Eugene – Innovation in City Government



Planning for growth in Eugene used to be predictably two sided. Development and business interests were pitted against neighborhood and environmental advocates - in the media, at public meetings, in the Council Chamber, and in the courts. In 2007, the state legislature handed the city a task – complete a buildable lands inventory and adopt a new Urban Growth Boundary.

The City was in a period of transition in many ways. A new Mayor, a new City Manager, and a new Planning Director all shared a desire to work with the community in a collaborative way. At the same time, community leaders were tired of the familiar winner-takes-all outcome of the typical land use process, which left everyone, at one time or another, on the losing side of a battle. The challenge for the City of Eugene was to avoid this scenario and create a public involvement process that involved as broad a spectrum of community members as possible to reach the community's collective best outcomes.

Engaging Community Members in Envision Eugene

Oregon's strong statewide program for land use planning has a long and well-regarded history. The foundation of that program is a set of 19 statewide planning goals. It is no surprise that Citizen Involvement is first among these goals. Extensive public involvement has been the hallmark of the state's planning program since it began.

The City of Eugene is also well known for high levels of public engagement. It is a city goal to provide a "government that works openly, collaboratively, and fairly with the community," and includes "transparent and interactive communication" as well as "public engagement that involves the community broadly."

Mayor Kitty Piercy, City Manager Jon Ruiz, and Planning Director Lisa Gardner decided to ask Bob Chadwick, Principal of Consensus Associates, to help design a community building process for Eugene. During the one-year period from January 2010 through January 2011, city staff and community members spent thousands of hours listening to one another and engaging in collaborative learning. People took notice: something different was happening in Eugene.

The Envision Eugene Community Resource Group or CRG was convened in June 2010 for an initial three day workshop. Participants included community leaders, current council members, including the Mayor, representatives of city boards and commissions, neighborhood groups,

environmental and land use advocacy groups, businesses, partner agencies, school districts, past City Councilors and the immediate past Mayor. With a personal invitation from the City Manager, people who had long ago written off public involvement in the planning process came to participate, and they stayed. The group grew to over 60 active members, meeting on average once a month for a full day.

The collaboration method used helps groups of people realize and articulate their fears, or worst possible outcomes, of a given process. Knowing what the worst possible outcomes are allows people to work through them, so they are able to move on to articulate their best possible outcomes, and then work together toward achieving those outcomes. The Community Resource Group, or CRG, spent a lot of time writing down their individual worst and best possible outcomes related to all aspects of Envision Eugene, from providing affordable housing, to assuring economic opportunities, to protecting and enhancing neighborhood livability.

Other public engagement methods supported the work of the CRG:

- Listening Interviews with individuals and interested groups, boards and commissions
- Monthly E-Newsletter to 450 people
- Public workshops and open houses
- Redevelopment Tour for the CRG, with self-guided option for anyone using Google Maps
- Art class projects with 100 sixth graders, and High School Art Contest
- Facebook page with 260 fans
- Comprehensive website at www.envisioneugene.org
- On-line open houses, surveys and comment forms
- Project videos posted on the website, YouTube and Facebook
- City Club Programs, rebroadcast on Community Radio KLCC
- Frequent city council presentations and work sessions

Project videos and other on-line tools are becoming a critical means of getting information out to community members. The current [on-line open house](#) features videos, maps, and comment forms about our community vision for accommodating growth in four areas: residential, public lands, commercial services, and industrial lands. Strategies for encouraging redevelopment along our key transit corridors and in core commercial areas will contribute to a compact, livable community and reduce our need to expand the urban growth boundary. The front-end work of the community resource group and the leadership of the Mayor and City Manager are smoothing the way for local decision making at the council level this spring.

The Envision Eugene process has been recognized by both local and state groups for its innovative community-based process. The CRG was given a community award by the Mayor at the Eugene State of the City address in January 2011 (photo above).

Then in June, Community Resource Group participants traveled to Salem with city staff to accept the STAR award for public involvement from the Department of Land Conservation and Development's Citizen Involvement Advisory Committee (photo at right).

