

Citizen Participation

Element 1



INTRODUCTION

Public participation in City decision-making processes is paramount to ensure City services, infrastructure, and priorities meet the needs of the community. The fundamental principle of inviting public input has been a priority to the City for many years.



“Dream Your City” public meeting, 2013

In fact, the “Dream your City” visioning process, used for this General Plan, included various means for public participation and communication. As part

of this process, the City, for the first time, used interactive software which allowed the public to participate in discussions online and provide comments regarding Sierra Vista’s future. Many of the goals that will be included in VISTA 2030 are a result of the well-thought-out comments made by the citizens.

“Make Sierra Vista truly a citizen-centric place to live.”

“City Government accountable to voters and taxpayers.”

“Invest in families.”

The City uses many forms of public participation, such as meetings held by Boards and Commissions, neighborhood meetings, public meetings, online surveys, and on-line civic-engagement tools such as “Speak-Up Sierra Vista.” Boards, Commissions, and Task Forces are advisory bodies to the Council, consisting of numerous citizen volunteers that represent the diversity of the community. Neighborhood meetings allow for direct public participation and focusing on local issues. Hearings before the Planning & Zoning Commission and City Council allow for public testimony on all public hearing items.

The City also informs the public of meetings through various means, such as direct mailings to affected property owners, posting meetings dates and times on affected properties, advertising meetings in the newspaper, and posting agendas in City buildings, electronically on the City website, and sending out email notifications. All these methods ensure all segments of the community are notified.

Social media is becoming a more important means for outreach efforts. Understanding the preferences of the community when it comes to connecting with their city government will remain a priority and guide future enhancements in the area of public participation. As technology, changes the City remains poised to take advantage of new opportunities to engage the community.

BACKGROUND

The City of Sierra Vista has had a Citizen Participation Element since the adoption of VISTA 2000 in 1985. On October 12, 2000, the City Council adopted Resolution 4471 that updated the public participation policy to meet the provisions of state law. Then, on December 9, 2004, in order to reach additional citizenry, the City Council adopted Resolution 2004-014 to increase the City's required public notification boundary area beyond state law's required distance.

GOALS AND STRATEGIES

Goal 1-1 Increase citizen participation in the governmental decision process

- Strategies*
1. Continue to seek out qualified individuals to serve on the City's Boards and Commissions.
The City approved the Board and Commission Practice and Procedures Guidelines in 2017 which outlined the roles, responsibilities, and membership requirements for Commission members. In 2020, many of the Commissions were reclassified as non-regulatory, which means that the Commissions would fall under the prevue of the applicable City Department. The City Council stated that the transition would enhance the ability of the commissioners and staff to better utilize public participation. As such, the City continues to seek qualified citizens to perform these tasks efficiently and effectively.
 2. Ensure the development community pursues early and effective citizen participation in conjunction with their applications.
The Development Code requires collaborative neighborhood meetings and discussions for all discretionary permits such a General Plan Amendments, Rezoning, Conditional Use Permits, and Specific Plans. Since the adoption of the General Plan, there have been a total of five Conditional Use Permits

and two Rezoning. Staff is confident that the current citizen participation requirements are effective and that this strategy is being addressed.

3. When possible, hold neighborhood meetings or public workshops near the locations affected by the decision.

Neighborhood meetings related to private development are typically located within the proximity of the requested development with notification consisting of direct mailings to the property owners. An attendance sheet and a summary of the meetings are required to be submitted with the applicant's application. Neighborhood meetings have been effective for City related functions as well. For example, the City organized a public workshop for discussion of future amenities at Timothy Lane Park in 2017. Most recently, in 2019, the City setup public meetings or charettes at the Sierra Suites hotel to discuss the West Fry Boulevard Corridor North Garden Avenue Improvement Project.

4. Ensure public notification is clearly understandable.

There are typically three forms of public notification for discretionary permits: sign posting on property, newspaper ads, and direct mailing to property owners. All forms of notification include the date, time, and location of the public hearings along with a description of the proposed request. The notifications are written to be easily understandable often accompanied with a map. The text on the sign posting is required to be seen from at least 100 feet away.

5. Ensure public notification is easily accessible to all individuals including those with disabilities.

In addition to all the required public notification requirements as stated above, the City also provides electronic notification of all public meetings and hearings on the City website. These notifications can typically be read audibly by a reader for those that are visually challenged. The City has updated the website to ensure maximum accessibility to all public information to include such things as closed captioning for both taped and live streaming. For audibly challenged individuals visiting the City Council Chambers, hearing assistive devices are available. The City is in the process of updating their audio/video system in the Council Chambers. The new system will provide greater accessibility opportunities for individuals with disabilities such as closed captioning. Additional services include online bill payments, telephone payments, and additional as-needed assistive services.

6. Schedule public hearings and meetings at times that provide the greatest opportunity for public participation.

The City Council and Planning & Zoning Commission meetings are scheduled at 5:00pm to allow individuals to attend the meetings after work. Additional meet & greets or other public events are typically scheduled after 5:00pm or on the weekends. The City Council meetings are streamed live and can be viewed at any time should citizens not be able to attend the meetings.

7. Enhance existing notification requirements, as feasible.

As stated previously, the City website provides additional opportunities for public notification. In addition, the public can provide comments electronically regarding projects or code amendments which are forwarded to the applicable staff. The City has mailed post cards and placed important community information in sanitation bills to help enhance the notification of citizens.

8. Ensure public actions are transparent and public documents are clear and understandable.

All public actions are conducted in a public forum with advanced public notification. The public can speak and present testimony at the hearings on any item on the agenda. Most documents are available to the general public with a Freedom of Information Act request. The documents have minimal technical language and are easily understandable by the general public.

9. Use the most current technology to keep the public better informed.

The City used Mindmixer as a public engagement tool during the update to the 2030 General Plan. Mindmixer allowed public comments through a public bulletin board format. The City is in the process of procuring another social engagement tool called Bang The Table which was used to collect public input on the West Fry Boulevard Corridor North Garden Avenue Improvement Project and the Parks Master Plan. The City also emails a weekly electronic newsletter to subscribers providing up to date information about the City. The City has previously used phone applications to inform the public of public services.

10. Use online and other social media tools to obtain public input, when appropriate.

In addition to the City webpage, information is also disseminated through social media tools such as Facebook and Twitter. The City Council meetings can be viewed and uploaded using YouTube.

11. Create web-based documents and maps to allow the public to review and download appropriate information. The City has created numerous interactive map-based documents to provide information to the public to include:
 - A. The Realtor's Portal and Developer's Portal- provide general lot and parcel information such as zoning, permit history, floodplain and utility locations, and traffic counts.
 - B. The Residential Setback Reference Map for Sierra Vista- provides building setback information for every parcel in the City.
 - C. Sierra Vista Business Inventory WebApp-is a business inventory application that describes the type of business within an existing structure and identifies the number of vacant buildings in the City. Additional information includes parcel numbers, estimated square footages, and vacancy contact information.
 - D. Sierra Vista Parks & Recreation Map-Identifies the name and location of each City Park including the recreational amenities provided.
 - E. Public Requests-This map application allows the public to provide comments related to public infrastructure such as reporting missing or cracked sidewalks or requesting street lights.
 - F. Zoning Map-Identifies the zoning district on each City parcel or lot.
 - G. Adopt-A-Area Map-Allows citizens to choose a location that they would like to adopt, such as streets, ashes, and parks. Adoption of these areas requires maintenance and clean-up obligations.
 - H. Refuse Service Area Map-Citizens can view which refuse area their house is located to determine which days their refuse is picked-up.

In addition to the map-based application there are additional documents that can be viewed and downloaded from the City website:

- A. Sierra Vista Land Development Code-the Code provides all the rules and standards required for the construction of new development. The new American Legal platform allows the Code to be searchable by keyword to make finding specific standards easier to find.
- B. VISTA 2030-the City's General Plan is the long-range Plan for development within the City. Includes elements such as Land Use, Parks, and Economic Development.

- C. Application forms for various planning, zoning, and building permitting processes can be obtained online, and in some instances, can be completed and submitted electronically.
- D. City Council Executive Report-provides a summary of activities from each City Department.
- E. VISTAS-the electronic version of VISTAS which provided the public updates on upcoming City sponsored events and projects.

12. Use e-mail to inform the public of specific projects.

The City emails documents or information to any citizen that requests electronic documents. The City's weekly electronic newsletter is emailed to all members of the public that subscribe to the service.

13. Provide web links to information pertaining to public hearings and public processes.

The City includes web links in all public hearing notices to allow the public to view and make comment on proposed projects or code amendments. In addition, links to Census 2020 or other information of national or state significance are posted on the City website.

14. Provide for radio, television, online streaming, and allow for real-time public participation.

The City currently broadcasts all City Council meetings on Channel 12 and streams the meeting live on YouTube. The YouTube videos are archived for view at a future time. Real-time participation such as sending texts or emails during a Council meeting as a form of Call to the Public is not yet an option. However, the City is proposing new audio/video network that will have additional capabilities.

15. Provide City-wide high-speed internet connectivity in City facilities to improve public participation.

The City provides Wi-fi in most City buildings. However, the City does not currently provide Wi-fi in the City parks. Cellular phone service is available in the parks which allow for Internet connectivity.

STATE LAW REQUIREMENTS

Arizona Revised Statutes, Section 9-461.06 B 1

“Adopt written procedures to provide effective, early and continuous public participation in the development and major amendment of general plans from all geographic, ethnic and economic areas of the municipality. The procedures shall provide for:

- (a) The broad dissemination of proposals and alternatives.*
- (b) The opportunity for written comments.*
- (c) Public hearings after effective notice.*
- (d) Open discussions, communications programs and information services.*
- (e) Consideration of public comments.”*

ATTACHMENTS

None

REFERENCES

None