City of Bellingham
Public Involvement Needs Assessment

Prepared for the City of Bellingham

Final Report December 2006

DUMAS & ASSOCIATES, INC.

CONTENTS

Executive Summary

The Public Involvement Assessment was conducted to provide the City of Bellingham insight on how to more effectively involve the public in various stages of the policy-making and project implementation cycles. Specifically, the city sought to identify opportunities to improve:

- Current practices, with an emphasis on potential guidelines for future public involvement programs and activities,
- Coordination and consistency across departments, and
- Training for increased staff expertise in public involvement.

Assessment participants included those city staff and community members most closely involved with city-sponsored public involvement. Fifty-five community members who are veterans of city-sponsored public involvement and 61 staff from five participating city departments (City Council, Mayor's Office, Public Works, Planning & Community, and Parks and Recreation) engaged in the electronic survey component of the assessment and 44 of these individuals participated in follow-up interviews.

While the Public Involvement Assessment Report focuses on assessment participants' recommendations for increasing the quality, coordination, and consistency of public involvement practices across departments, it should be noted that survey and interview responses indicated a high regard for the city's staff and their efforts. Assessment participants shared many examples of city-sponsored public involvement activities that have been highly successful and responsive to community input, along with insightful suggestions for improvements.

Given the limited scope of this assessment project, the consultant report outlines critical opportunities for improvement based on key themes from participant responses and best practices in public involvement. The full report presents staff participants' responses separately from those of the participating community members so readers can more readily see the many shared perspectives and suggestions. These assessment results should not be interpreted as representing the views of all City of Bellingham staff or all Bellingham community members as a whole. The survey and interview responses reflect the opinions of only those staff and community members who chose to participate.

The following consultant recommendations were developed after analyzing the key themes from staff and community members' survey and interview responses.

1. Actively affirm leadership and organizational values for public input.
2. Rebuild trust and create a working partnership with the community.
3. Improve public involvement outreach and design of activities to engage a broader mix.
4. Establish public involvement guiding principles and promote consistency.
5. Increase transparency on how public input is used by staff and decision-makers.
6. Take an interdepartmental approach to designing public involvement activities.
7. Build understanding of and value for public involvement through education and training.

The City of Bellingham Public Involvement Assessment is one component in a larger city endeavor to improve involvement of citizens in the decisions that affect them. Another element is the biannual telephone survey last conducted in June 2006. The report from that survey, along with the Public Involvement Assessment Report will be used by the city to develop an action plan for public involvement program improvements in 2007. It is our hope that the city will seize this moment to engage community members and staff at all levels in a joint review of the findings to identify mutual goals for public involvement quality and effectiveness and the early and long-term actions necessary to support these goals.

1. Introduction

Across the country citizens are asking for an earlier and more meaningful role in public policy development. This call for a more influential citizen role has increased expectations for public involvement here in Bellingham. Public involvement supports an essential partnership —that of citizens and city staff of all levels, from elected decision-makers to frontline support staff. Working together these partners can more effectively enhance the quality of community, each with their distinct role and contributions.

Several questions drive the design of public involvement programs: how early in the policy development process will engagement occur; how often will input be sought; and what approaches will be most appropriate and effective. While individual departments are faced with determining the best use of available resources, meeting regulatory and planning timelines, and engaging the public, the elected officials must attend to concurrent policy development activities and increased pressures from constituency groups. In the midst of all of this, community members try to assess which public involvement opportunities provide access for the most significant input. Competing needs and inconsistent approaches can frustrate the best efforts and undermine important ongoing relationships with the public.

At some point it makes sense to just step back and look at the big picture. The City of Bellingham Public Involvement Assessment (Public Involvement Assessment) was conducted to provide the city a bit of that big picture, from the eyes of those most closely involved with city public involvement —staff across all levels and community members who are veterans of city-sponsored public involvement.

Purpose of the Assessment
The Public Involvement Assessment was conducted to provide the City of Bellingham insight on how to more effectively involve the public in various stages of the policy-making and project implementation cycles. Specifically, the city sought to identify opportunities to improve:

- Current practices, with an emphasis on potential guidelines for future public involvement programs and activities,
- Coordination and consistency across departments, and
- Training for increased staff expertise in public involvement.

The City of Bellingham Public Involvement Assessment is one component in the city's larger endeavor to improve involvement of citizens in the decisions that affect them. Launched by Mayor Asmundson in June 2006, the Public Involvement Assessment was designed as a qualitative examination of the city's public involvement practices and conducted as a follow-up step to the telephone survey conducted in early June 2006.[1] The consultant team identified key themes from participant responses and outlined critical opportunities for improvement in the city's public involvement practices. Given the limited scope of this assessment project, these recommendations are not presented as specific action plans with proposed resource allocations. The results of both the telephone survey and the assessment themes will be used by the city to develop an action plan for public involvement program improvements in 2007.

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[1] Service Priorities and Customer Satisfaction Survey, conducted in June 2006, results and presentation materials available on the city's website at www.cob.org click on "Mayor".

<u>Assessment Approach</u>
This assessment examined the public involvement practices of five departments: City Council, Mayor, Planning & Community Development, Public Works, and Parks & Recreation. The assessment used a combination of electronic surveys and personal interviews. Participants included city personnel most closely involved with public involvement (including: elected officials, managing, technical, and support staff) and community members who were identified as "veterans of city-sponsored public involvement" and recommended by the Mayor's Neighborhood Advisory Committee and the Association of Bellingham Neighborhoods. [2]

Public involvement is a broad term and includes a wide range of program approaches and activities. We used the following framework for examining public involvement activities in the assessment tools..[3]

Framework of Public Involvement Activities

<u>Communications</u>: A one-way information exchange in which the city provides information to the public to inform or educate, e.g., mailings, web postings, television programs, newspaper articles.

<u>Listening:</u> A one-way information exchange in which the city gathers information from the public through various methods, e.g., surveys, phone polls, market research, web-based polls.

<u>Consulting:</u> A brief event in which the city invites the public to discuss information on policies, projects or programs that have not been finalized, e.g., neighborhood meetings, workshops, open houses, design charettes.

<u>Engaging</u>: An ongoing forum in which the city engages the public in in-depth discussions about the issues, e.g., Advisory Boards, Commissions, stakeholder groups.

<u>Partnering:</u> City and community groups sharing responsibility to develop policy, program, or project decisions, e.g., Depot Market Square, where design decisions were shared with the Design Committee.[4]

A quantitative inventory tool was also provided to participating city departments to identify the resources allocated to support public involvement activities sponsored by the department from July 2005 through June 2006. Staff will complete this inventory by January 2007 so the data can be used as part of the city's ongoing public involvement improvement efforts.

<u>Findings and Recommendations</u>
Assessment participants provided a wealth of insight on the effectiveness of the city's public involvement activities, as well as suggestions for improving current practices and consistency across departments. The report outlines key themes drawn from the assessment participants' suggestions for how public involvement practices could be improved and provides consultant recommendations on key opportunities for advancing the quality of public involvement based on these themes. These assessment results should not be interpreted as representing the views of all City of Bellingham staff or all Bellingham community members as a whole. The survey and interview responses reflect the opinions of only those staff and community members who chose to participate. Staff participants' responses are presented separately from those of the

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[2] The assessment design and methods are outlined in Appendix A.
[3] The survey questions for both participant groups are included in Appendix B.
[4] Framework adapted from Health Canada's Public Involvement Continuum

participating community members so the reader can more readily see the many shared perspectives and suggestions.

While the Public Involvement Assessment Report focuses on assessment participants' recommendations for improving the quality of public involvement practices, it should be noted that the survey and interview responses also indicated a high regard for the city's staff and their efforts. Assessment participants shared many examples of city-sponsored public involvement activities that have been highly successful and responsive to community members' input, along with insightful suggestions for improvements.

Highlights of Consultant Recommendations

1. Actively Affirm Leadership and Organizational Values for Public Input

   A collaborative leadership attitude and demonstrated value of public input as an important part of the city's work is necessary to improve the quality of public involvement. Both staff and citizen participants indicated the current culture of decision-making in the city (attitudes and practices) does not support effective public involvement. A strong theme throughout responses was the perception that the city has a predetermined outcome and what the public has to offer is not needed. There was a predominant concern that until the city's leadership articulates a more collaborative public involvement philosophy and establishes corresponding practices, the quality of public involvement in the city will not improve. Without this, all other efforts will likely be seen as window-dressing.

2. Rebuild Trust and Create a Working Partnership with the Community

   Both staff and citizens expressed concern over the loss of a working partnership between community and staff. Rebuilding trust is an incremental process, for some this involves acknowledging mistakes, as well as taking corrective action. An important starting point is for the city to gain a thorough understanding of community/neighborhood needs and values, as they are understood by the neighborhoods, not just how they fit into isolated policy, code, or projects under review.

3. Improve Public Involvement Outreach and Design of Activities to Engage a Broader Mix

   A strong theme was the call for more of the public involvement activities to occur at an earlier stage in the recommendation development and be designed to allow for more meaningful discussions with staff and community members. City outreach efforts should engage a broader mix of community members and use a variety of methods to do so; keeping in mind many community members interested in issues are not able or likely to attend meetings.

4. Establish Public Involvement Guiding Principles and Promote Consistency

   The public needs assurance that their input is timely, meaningful to the task at hand, and will be considered by staff and decision-makers. Consistency in mandatory and optional involvement activities, timing, duration, and dissemination of public input is needed across departments. To accomplish this the city should develop public involvement standards with specific guidance on meeting formats, timing of involvement, information dissemination and collection for mandatory and optional public involvement activities. These guidelines should also address expected variations in public involvement standards for the different departments and project types.

5. Increase Transparency on How Public Input is Used by Staff and Decision-makers

The communications following public involvement activities to report out what was heard and how it was used is equally important as notification communications. Community members and staff participants alike indicated that the necessary resources are not always there to support the level of sustained public involvement outreach as desired. Project budgets should include allocation of necessary staff time and financial resources to design and conduct public involvement activities, as well as collate, report out, and show how public input was integrated.

6. Take An Interdepartmental Approach to Designing Public Involvement Activities

Community members experience the services of parks, transportation, and community planning and development as interconnected elements of their neighborhood's quality-of-life. Public involvement programs or projects should use interdepartmental teams when appropriate, especially in the areas of neighborhood, long-term planning, and policy and code revision efforts. The interdisciplinary teams should also be used as part of the design and implementation phases of projects to assure critical cause and effect questions are explored by various departments prior to, during, and following the public involvement activities.

7. Build Understanding of and Value for Public Involvement through Education and Training

Both citizens and staff could benefit from increased understanding of public involvement mandates and practices across city departments. Community members interested in city government should be encouraged to attend education programs on how the city works, as well as sessions on collaborative processes and negotiation. Staff development in these areas could also be enhanced. Five topics that should be covered in a city employee training program to improve public involvement activities include: orientation to the city's philosophy on public involvement; an overview of public involvement approaches, tools and activities for gathering public input; designing public involvement programs and activities; designing and managing effective public meetings; and communication skills that support public education and engagement.

Conclusion and Next Steps

Throughout this assessment we have held an assumption that quality public involvement is not simply achieved by adding more activities. While we have heard a call from some respondents for more public involvement, the overwhelming response was a call for more meaningful opportunities to give input at a stage in project or policy design where such input will truly have influence on the options the decision-makers will consider. This call was expressed in regard to the role of existing advisory boards and committees, the general public's input on projects and policies, and the city's working partnership with neighborhoods.

Improvement efforts need to take into consideration the limits citizens have on their time, and the city's limits on resources. It is our hope that the city will seize this moment to engage community members and staff in a joint review of the Public Involvement Assessment and Service Priorities and Customer Satisfaction Survey findings to identify mutual goals for public involvement quality and effectiveness. Strategic action plans that will support these mutual goals are needed to focus the city's efforts in working toward a more productive and effective partnership with the community.

2. Consultant Team Recommendations

Bellingham is a vibrant community comprised of unique neighborhoods and passionate citizens. The Assessment finds that participating citizens and staff are both experiencing the pressure of increasing growth and service demands, which can create a challenging environment for productive communications. In addition, the complexity of planning code and regulatory structures of the various city departments contribute to increased confusion and/or frustration concerning the expectations for public involvement.

In spite of the tensions identified by the staff and community members we spoke to, assessment participants highlighted the city's positive work in a wide variety of public involvement activities. Survey responses and interviewees provided many examples of the city's willingness to explore new approaches and responsiveness to the call for changes in this important aspect of the city's work. Given the purpose of the Public Involvement Assessment is to identify opportunities for improvement, these accolades are not outlined in the report, though it should be noted that assessment participants from both groups expressed a positive recognition of staff and citizens' contributions and an appreciation for the opportunity to engage in the assessment.

Staff and community member participants provided a wealth of creative recommendations on how the city can improve public involvement activities, increase coordination across departments, and enhance the public's role in developing policy and projects. The consultant team's recommendations presented below are based upon two factors: 1) frequency of reference to this area of improvement in both community member and staff surveys and interviews, and 2) practical opportunities for city-initiated action with the potential for positive affects on the quality of public involvement activities and effectiveness of citizen input.

2.1. Public Involvement Practices

R1. Actively Affirm Leadership and Organizational Values for Public Input

The strongest sentiment throughout responses from both the citizen and staff assessment groups was the call for the city's leadership (City Council, Mayor, and department heads) to establish and convey a unified city philosophy for public involvement across all departments. A strong theme was the perception that the city has a predetermined outcome when it comes to the public for input and that what the public has to offer is not needed or there is insufficient time to integrate the input. The culture of decision-making, attitudes and practices should be consistent with the city's philosophy. Without a strong, expressed commitment to the value of public involvement in the city's work, all other improvement efforts will likely have little impact.

Through this assessment project the city has initiated important discussions within the departments and the community. Some staff and citizen participants felt this level of reflection on how the city conducts public involvement was a great start. Inclusive, transparent follow-up to the assessment findings is critical. A strategic work plan addressing the key issues raised in the assessment is needed to assure both the Council and the Mayor are working together with department heads and the community in the area of public involvement. Leadership should clarify the city's philosophy on public involvement and convey it to staff and the community.

R2. Rebuild Trust and Create a Working Partnership with the Community

Both staff and citizen assessment participants expressed concern over the loss of a working partnership between the community and staff. Rebuilding trust is an incremental process; for some this involves acknowledging mistakes, as well as taking corrective action. An important starting point is for the city to gain a thorough understanding of community/neighborhood needs and values, as they are understood by the neighborhoods, not just how they fit into isolated policy, code, or projects under review.

City staff and leadership should come to the various neighborhood meetings as listeners, not presenters, on a regular basis. An annual calendar and sufficient resources should be established to insure the effort is sustained throughout all neighborhoods. While this is a long-term approach to addressing a fractured trust, the presence and attention in every neighborhood could improve perceptions of inequity in regard to certain neighborhoods having the resources and activism necessary to garner city officials' attention.

Survey and interview respondents also indicated that the timing and type of public involvement activities also contributes to the quality of the staff/citizen partnership. When appropriate and affordable, early, non-mandatory work sessions should be held, specifically designed to allow for meaningful discussions to take place. These should occur well in advance of the formal comment sessions and legally required public hearings. This approach would promote a problem solving orientation to staff and citizen discussions rather than limiting exchanges to comment/rebuttal style communications. The timing and duration of public involvement activities should also take into consideration the level of effort asked of citizens and the potential for public interest to peter out before the final process is completed.

Short-term opportunities to enhance trust and rebuild working relationships are equally important. The first of these could be a joint review of the Public Involvement Needs Assessment by staff and community member assessment participants to identify the next steps for advancing the quality of public involvement. The city's existing advisory boards and commissions could also be engaged in identifying early actions that would increase the quality and effectiveness of their working partnerships with sponsoring departments.

R3. Improve Public Involvement Outreach and Design of Activities to Engage a Broader Mix

Assessment responses indicated that the city uses a wide-variety of outreach methods and public involvement activities. The community members we spoke with are highly sophisticated in discerning the different types of public involvement activities[5] and appreciate the city's creativity. This area of the assessment received the highest number of examples of public involvement done well, as well as suggestions on how public involvement outreach and activities could be improved. Suggestions focused primarily on outreach campaigns to draw a broader mix of community members, the timing of public involvement opportunities, and the design of input activities that will create access outside of meetings.

City outreach efforts should seek to engage a broader mix of community members by using a variety of methods, including on-site signage, improvements on the city website, and direct outreach through neighborhood group E-mails, along with the traditional public meeting notices in the media.

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[5] See chart on page 4 for the assessment framework of public involvement activities.

A strong theme from the assessment participants was the call for more of the public involvement activities to occur at an earlier stage in the recommendation development and for these activities to be structured in ways that allow for more meaningful discussions with staff and community members. Public involvement program design standards could help clarify expectations regarding the timing of public input on various project types and the resources necessary to support such efforts.

Multiple public involvement approaches should be used for project and policy input. Design of these activities should keep in mind the many community members interested in the project or policy issues who are not able or likely to attend meetings. While the city has been highly creative in using a variety of public involvement activities (open houses, charrettes, and meetings held in neighborhoods and at the city buildings) additional non-meeting opportunities should be increased. Web-based approaches to public involvement could be explored to expand opportunities for members of the public to comment.

R4. Establish Public Involvement Guiding Principles and Promote Consistency

Consistency in mandatory and optional involvement activities, timing, duration, and dissemination of public input is needed across departments. To accomplish this the city should develop public involvement standards with specific guidance on meeting formats, timing of involvement, information dissemination and collection for mandatory and optional public involvement activities. These guidelines should also address expected variations in public involvement standards for the different departments and project types.

Given the city's history of implementing a variety of public involvement methods, staff have gained significant insight into how the design of session agendas, physical space, and discussion formats can impact the quality of the engagement experience, as well as the quality of input. A staff mentorship program would expand the city's internal resources for public involvement. Additional training for key staff working in the area of public involvement should align with the city's overall philosophy and guiding principles, and have evaluation standards to encourage increased consistency with the city's public involvement improvement efforts. See Section 2.3 for recommended training program objectives.

R5. Increase Transparency on How Public Input is Use by Staff and Decision-makers

Communications following public input is equally important as the quality of the activities used to gather that input. Such follow-up communications should report out what was heard and how the information and comments were used. Community members and staff assessment participants alike indicated that the necessary resources are not always there to support the level of public involvement outreach and sustained communications desired. Project budgets should include allocation of necessary staff time and financial resources to design and conduct public involvement activities, as well as collate, report out, and integrate public input.

As the city implements the projects included in long-term planning efforts, such as six-year or master plans, public involvement educational materials should reflect the history of the public input junctures and illustrate how input has been used. Often by the time a project is funded and ready for implementation, this rich history of public input is no longer visible and the members of the community have changed.

2.2. Coordination

The following consultant recommendations outline opportunities for improving coordination of public involvement practices and activities across departments.

R6. Take an Interdepartmental Approach to Designing Public Involvement Activities

Community members experience the services of parks, transportation, and community planning and development as interconnected elements of their neighborhood's quality-of-life. While regulatory code and policy are organized into specialized areas and city departments, the codes and policies create interdependent conditions when new development takes place, e.g., development of a park in one neighborhood could have traffic flow impacts on adjacent neighborhoods. Educational efforts, as well as team approaches to community involvement, can increase citizen understanding of each department's unique responsibilities.

Public involvement programs or projects should use interdepartmental teams when appropriate, especially in the area of neighborhood, long-term planning, and policy and code revision efforts. The interdisciplinary teams should also be used as part of the design and implementation phases of projects to assure critical 'cause and effect' questions are explored by various departments prior to, during and following public involvement activities.

As a staff respondent indicated, "Without clear priorities, staff cannot succeed at its public involvement objectives or other projects, there are just too many activities to be effective." Coordination and interdepartmental teams without the leadership, direction, and resources will simply create more activity in an already busy city. The following recommendations are necessary to elements of an interdepartmental approach.

R6 a. Allocate Necessary Resources to Support Coordination

Simply directing staff to coordinate more often in the area of public involvement is not the only answer; coordination needs to be linked to resources and the authority to act. Necessary resources and decision-making authority must be established to keep coordination efforts from simply becoming a series of additional meetings.

Interdisciplinary teams should include a clear statement of purpose and have an identified lead accountable for the project's work plan and communications. Plans should be exchanged across departments for review of the work in context of other departments' codes and responsibilities. Teams should participate in the design and implementation of public involvement activities so the right staff is available to answer questions and model coordination.

R6 b. Coordinate Information Resources for Easy Citizen Access

Respondents indicated that access to accurate, timely information is a critical element of the public's ability to engage. To support internal communications and coordination, a simple project status template should be used to keep staff informed of changes or progress in project schedules and upcoming public involvement junctures, such as the one developed for the Public Works Department. The city might also consider designating a point person for each major proposed project, who could direct citizen inquiries and comments to the appropriate staff.

Respondents value the city's existing website and BTV10 programming and indicated that these media could be better used to support and enhance communication and involvement efforts. A citizen/staff working group should assess the city's website to identify areas for improved usability.

2.3. Training

R7. Build Understanding of and Value for Public Involvement through Education and Training

Both citizen and staff could benefit from increased understanding of public involvement mandates and practices across city departments. Community members interested in city government should be encouraged to attend training sessions that provide education about how the city works, as well as sessions on collaborative processes and negotiation. Staff development in these areas could also be enhanced. Five topics that should be covered in a city employee public involvement training program include: orientation to the city's philosophy on public involvement; an overview of public involvement approaches, tools and activities; designing public involvement programs and activities; designing and managing effective public meetings; and communication skills – oral and written.

Good training is critical to improving public involvement activities. After reviewing survey information and data from individual interviews and survey responses, the consultant team offers training recommendations in three areas:
- <u>What</u> content should be offered
- <u>Who</u> should receive the training
- <u>How</u> and <u>when</u> training should be delivered

<u>What Content Should be Offered</u>

Five topics that should be covered in a training program to improve public involvement activities include: 1) the city's philosophy toward public involvement; 2) an overview of public involvement approaches, tools and activities; and 3) designing public involvement programs and activities; and 4) designing and managing effective public meetings; and 5) communication skills – oral and written.

1. The City's Philosophy on Public Involvement
   As the City of Bellingham reassesses its philosophy on public involvement it will need to convey to all of its staff the values and attitudes it chooses to pursue.

2. Overview of Public Involvement Approaches, Tools and Activities
   Staff needs guidance on what public involvement activities are available and appropriate for specific types of programs, policies and projects in the city. This would be an overview of what methods and tools can be used and how to implement these in accordance with the city's public involvement standards and guidelines.

3. Designing Public Involvement Programs and Activities
   The staff also needs training on designing specific public involvement programs or activities that includes:
   - What types of activities are available and appropriate for a specific type of project
   - What steps are necessary in a productive public involvement program
   - Who should be involved in designing a public involvement process (includes citizens)
   - How to use neighborhood associations or other groups to help design public involvement activities, outreach and meetings
   - How citizens can be involved in all stages of the process (early to completion)
   - What timeframe is realistic and appropriate for a program or activity

4. Designing and Managing Effective Public Meetings
   Central to an effective public involvement program is knowing how to run productive public meetings. Meeting facilitation training should include:
   - Knowing what is required in terms of notification and other legal issues
   - Clarifying and sharing the purpose and expected outcomes of a meeting
   - Selecting an appropriate meeting format for the topic, size of group, and level of conflict
   - Developing and managing ground rules
   - Creating a realistic agenda
   - Constructive ways to convey information for a variety of participant styles
   - Drawing information out of people
   - Keeping people focused on their subject
   - Building consensus and negotiating when needed
   - Dealing with difficult people and situations
   - Reaching closure and defining next steps

5. Communication Skills – Oral and Written
   Training to enhance both oral and written communication skills will improve the public involvement activities in the city. Communication training should be targeted to different needs of staff including:

   Oral Communications
   - How to be an effective speaker –well prepared, trained in techniques that work, convey warmth, and appropriate sense of humor
   - How to solicit feedback that is productive and not confrontational
   - How to be a good listener, how to avoid becoming defensive
   - How to work with people who are challenging, angry or difficult in large crowds
   - How to deliver messages
   - How to deal with multiple value sets in a public meeting
   - How to frame issues to get the most productive feedback
   - How to be helpful on the phone
   - How to work with upset citizens on tough issues

   Written Communications
   - How to write clearly for public consumption, in terms people can understand – use interesting formats, make publications more accessible, create "fact sheets"
   - How to interact with the press. What is expected – just the facts, how to respond to questions, when to be proactive, how to do news releases, how to deal with reporters
   - PowerPoint presentations – when to use and when not to use it
   - Training for website team designers to create a positive "user experience"

6. Two Additional Training Topic Areas To Consider

   Council would benefit from training on how it might better engage with the public to minimize misunderstanding and enhance trust. This training might cover what Council can and can't do, such as its ability to bring forward ordinances, and how to respond to intense demands from the public as part of an overall public involvement strategy. Citizens would like to see the Council engage in more open debate on critical issues.

   The public would benefit from additional opportunities to learn about how the city operates. Many people compliment the Planning Department for initiating the Neighborhood Planning Academy and hope the city will organize similar activities in the future.

<u>Who Should Receive the Training</u>

Staff members who are responsible for managing and conducting public involvement activities should receive training, if needed, in the first five public involvement categories listed earlier. Staff who will be managing and conducting public involvement activities with the public need an understanding of the city's philosophy on public involvement, a knowledge of the range of appropriate strategies for particular situations, the ability to design and manage programs and activities including meeting management and interpersonal communication skills.

City staff that interacts orally or in writing with the public outside specific public involvement activities should be familiar with the city's philosophy on public involvement and receive training in basic oral and written communications. This includes support staff.

Council, advisory board and commission members should be able to sign up for any training that is offered to staff.

Citizens who are interested in city government should be encouraged to attend sessions that provide education about how the city works, as well as sessions on collaborative processes and negotiation.

<u>How and When Training Should Be Delivered</u>

Training for effective public involvement needs to occur on a regular and more frequent basis than in the past. A programmatic approach that is tied to job performance and duties was suggested to both support development and accountability to citywide standards. Some suggestions for advancing a programmatic training approach include:
- Offer local training to city staff on the content areas listed above.
- Public involvement training should be part of any new employee's orientation. New staff orientation should include an understanding of the culture and expectations of staff regarding their relationship to the public. The amount and type of training will depend on the staff person's job description and background.
- In addition to local training, provide resources for staff to attend workshops and sessions sponsored by Association of Washington Cities and other professional associations.
- Consider short (5-15 minutes) in-house training sessions during staff meetings on specific techniques, once a month. Distribute group e-mail after training sessions with information about more resources.
- Provide training on project-based activities.
- Provide mentoring opportunities for staff to build skills and expertise.
- Consider offering and/or requiring continuing education credits for planners and other professionals

3. Participant Response Themes

3.1. Community Participant Themes

Community member assessment participants were identified by the Mayor's Neighborhood Advisory Commission (MNAC) and the Association of Bellingham Neighborhoods (ABN) and selected to assure survey and interview participants were: geographically distributed across Bellingham's many neighborhoods and represented a mix of active members of the MNAC, the ABN or their own neighborhood association. These individuals were identified by their peers as veterans of the city's public involvement activities at the neighborhood or citywide scale, with familiarity and 'on the ground, in the trenches' experience to draw from. Of the 130 community members selected for participation in the assessment, 55 completed the electronic survey (42%) and 18 of the 20 (90%) selected for interviews completed their private interview either face-to-face or by phone.

The themes identified below were drawn from the survey and interview responses. Following each theme is a brief description of the issues raised, and a listing of examples from comments, and summary of their recommendations. While citizen respondents shared many examples of staff commitment and work in the area of public involvement, the purpose of this report is to focus on areas for improvement. Therefore, the participant themes, assessment highlights, and recommendations describe elements of the city's public involvement practices that could be improved upon. Assessment participants were pleased to be engaged in reflecting on the city's public involvement practices and provided creative suggestions for the city's consideration.

Community Participant Response Theme 1

The current culture of decision-making in the city does not support effective public involvement.

The city is perceived by many of the citizens surveyed and interviewed to have a top-down decision-making approach where public involvement is seen simply as an exercise in ensuring there was a meeting where a proposal was aired and that staff was on hand. Many citizen participants believe public processes waste valuable time and potentially creative energy if the city is not responsive to the ideas of the public or not prepared to integrate the input. When the city is not genuinely interested or prepared to use public input, an 'us' versus 'them' attitude is generated in both the staff and public.

Many citizen participants feel the city departments and the City Council tend to have their minds made-up before listening to public input. In some cases the citizens shared experiences in which they felt that departments viewed public input as a barrier to their decision-making. Some departments seem to want to 'tell' the public what is best and some are visibly annoyed at the prospect of working with citizens as 'colleagues.' It seems they would prefer to run the city without public involvement. Listening to public input without integration of the input is frustrating to survey respondents and seen as a waste of time for both staff and citizens.

To some citizen assessment participants it appears that the Mayor generally decides on major issues then directs the staff, the staff then meets with Council members to persuade them. The perception is that if a 'group comes up with a recommendation consistent with the Mayor's agenda it will pass, if the group's recommendation is not consistent with the Mayor's agenda it's

tough luck.' While the assessment asked for participants to share experiences from the past, the impact of these perceptions is likely affecting the current climate of public involvement.

Some felt that the real issue is with the Council, not the staff. Some citizens we spoke with feel the Council values consensus among themselves over genuine discussion and debate with the public. With an interest in appearing united, the Council is seen as shying away from discussing controversial issues before the public. The City Council's culture of consensus means that there is not a robust discussion of ideas, no one is ever challenged and decisions are made outside of the public realm. Citizens would like to discuss ideas with the Council, get answers to questions and see a real debate of issues.

Community Member Survey and Interview Comment Highlights

"From my perspective, the Mayor generally decides, directs staff, they meet with Council members to avoid open public meeting acts, and Council is given direction. Only at Council meetings is the public listened to, then a vote is taken. Immediately prior to the vote, the Council makes speeches. At no time is there a real exchange and at no time are questions and ideas discussed."

"Citizen input is often perceived as an obstacle to carrying out whatever plans city staff have reached an agreement on with business or other organized interest groups. Citizens not representing these interests need to be in on the early stages of any plan, so that plans are not formulated and then dropped before an irate public. When substantial citizen opposition exists, the city usually just tries to stonewall rather than gather real input to determine the public wishes."

"Critical public processes —Greenways and the Waterfront come to mind— are short circuited. Ideas aren't heard, the public's not involved at the right time and there's no dialogue. The result is always mediocre. Public hearings are visibly just required by law. This is our city yet we have little opportunity to share in the decisions."

"The city filters input from citizens to match the city's pre-conceived ideas. When different ideas arise, city's response is to circle the wagons and not seek partnership with citizens."

Community Member Participants' Recommendations from Surveys and Interviews

1. View citizens as an asset rather than a hindrance and embrace a culture that engages citizens as partners not competitors in collaborative problem-solving. Recognize the importance of public collaboration in city affairs by changing the city's style from one of "selling it to the public" to "we can work this out together" as team problem solvers. Specific suggestions to address this include:
   a. Focus MNAC agendas on two-way discussions; don't bring the community together to talk at us.
   b. Where appropriate, let decisions be driven by advisory committees rather than staff.
   c. Create ways for citizens to work with builders and developers as a mixed group.
   d. Restore the MNAC to let the representatives give the Mayor their neighborhood concerns and have the Mayor direct the correct staff to help the neighborhood. Listen to the neighborhood needs instead of dictating to MNAC members what the city wants them to hear.
   e. Consider some sessions in the evening that accommodate citizens who work at other jobs during the day. Because critical business tends to be done during the day, involvement is centered on professional staff of developers and paid advocates.

2. Encourage leadership to see that disagreement is a positive, people care and we need to value our differences, even if we cannot resolve them all. Citizens want to identify and understand differences.

3. Provide a regular and ongoing dialogue (e.g., Council Member Beardsley's 'fishbowl' model) to assure a genuine two-way communication between the city and citizens.

4. Provide citizens with more accessibility to Council members while also recognizing the workload the Council faces is only supposed to be part-time.

5. Reestablish neighborhood links with the Mayor, Council, and department heads, not just with the staff.

6. Build time into public involvement processes so that genuine discussions about issues, opportunities for accommodation, and agreement can occur. Following artificial deadlines won't get the best results.

7. Provide additional resources for the city so that the staff can work with citizens without being overworked for lack of appropriate staffing.

8. Consider creating a citizen advocate position as part of government, whose job would be to listen to citizens and advocate their involvement at neighborhood, staff, and Council levels. The advocate would let citizens know what can and cannot be done and work collaboratively with all parties to reach solutions.

9. Create a true ombudsman position that listens to all sides, seeks resolution, and if not achievable, then pursues next level of options. (Office of Neighborhood Services Coordinator position is functioning as a referral system not an advocate or representative of citizen concerns directly to Council and staff).

10. Increase support staff to the City Council so they have time to evaluate information and can bring people into discussion. Consider hiring a staff analyst for the Council. Currently Council members cannot fully vet or analyze information they receive from staff.

11. Consider having a full-time Council for a city growing at this rate with these kinds of issues.

Community Participant Response Theme 2

Public involvement in the city will not improve unless the leadership of the city is willing to articulate and implement a more collaborative public involvement philosophy with corresponding attitudes and a set of effective practices.

Many citizens we spoke with feel the city has not publicly stated its philosophy toward public involvement. A lack of unified philosophy has led to inconsistencies in practice, mixed expectations, and a perception that the city is not interested in the views of the citizens. As the city continues to grow and evolve it needs to develop and project a vision of what type of role public involvement will have.

Citizen participants would like to see the city's decision-makers define and assert a philosophy that views the public as a valuable asset with knowledge and wisdom to contribute to decision-making. Assessment participants would like the city leaders to shift from what they currently perceive to be a 'we know best' philosophy to a 'we can solve this together' approach by means of a citizen partnership on important issues. Citizens would like a commitment from leadership that citizens, staff, and administration need to work together to address critical issues.

Citizen interviewees felt that the Mayor and department heads need to lead this effort because of Bellingham's strong mayor system. They also recognized that any new philosophy would need to be embraced beyond the senior levels of management and conveyed to the staff in city departments who are responsible for implementing public involvement activities.

Community Member Survey and Interview Comment Highlights

"I believe the city should create a new paradigm for public involvement activities; a 'res publica' for all stakeholders to be invited to discuss important public policies. I believe that when citizens are given the opportunity and are welcomed to participate in an open process, they will accept the decisions that are made as fair. Public process is messy work. Leaving citizens out of the process may be considered efficient, but I worry about the effectiveness of such a decision-making process."

"More effort is put into selling decisions to the public than listening to what the public actually wants."

"Recognize that leadership involves convincing the public that a particular course of action is best for all by answering legitimate concerns. Charging ahead on public projects without the support of the public because "they'll love it when it's done" is not leadership - it's dictatorship. It angers reasonable people."

"Part of the difficulty is we have a Council that lacks leadership, that is unwilling to draft ordinances and put policies in place. Urban Villages - great idea but no follow-through. Protecting Lake Whatcom - no staff and no follow-through. This isn't the fault of staff, it's the fault of decision-makers."

Community Member Participants' Recommendations from Surveys and Interviews

1. City leaders need to exert strong leadership by defining a philosophy of public involvement, by promoting an attitude of genuine interest in and regard for public input among city officials, and by overseeing the implementation of effective practices.

2. City officials and staff need to model effective public involvement activities with the highest level of sincerity. Demonstrating shifts in behaviors will give confidence to the public that the city understands what has not worked in the past.

3. Citizens need to be viewed as an asset in the planning process. Department staff needs to go out with a sincere desire to get input and to work well with citizens as co-problem solvers.
4. The city should implement a leadership and staff training program focused on collaborative public involvement theory and practice.

5. Leadership needs to be willing to take the heat of enforcing when development fails to deliver or undoes design elements that were part of permitting process after the bonding timeframe.

6. Leadership can take responsibility for educating the public about the dilemma of reaching closure because of time demands and the need to resolve issues in order to move forward. The city can initiate quality processes that include educating the public about the context and constraints on the issues. Staff should be willing to present ideas to decision-makers with minority opinions rather than advancing a false consensus.

Community Participant Response Theme 3

Increased predictability and consistency around public involvement activities offered by the city is desired.

Citizen assessment participants think clear, predictable public involvement processes would be helpful so that the citizens know how the process works and how they can influence it. Citizens feel handicapped not knowing what to expect or when to anticipate the most effective point for participation. They see a discrepancy among the city's departments regarding the type and amount of public involvement activities, which adds to confusion and frustration.

Citizens would like the Council to operate with more transparency and accountability. They feel too many decisions are either made behind closed doors without any public presence or that the Council caves to a few strong voices at the end of a lengthy public involvement process, which negates the will of the majority and a longer history of public input. Clear reporting on how public input was used could enhance the public involvement efforts and confidence in the process.

Community Member Survey and Interview Comment Highlights

"Leadership stepping in to give some people what they want, while other's don't get it; this undermines a teamwork approach."

"A few citizens can come in late and derail a decision made earlier that was based on extensive public involvement."

"Make input from the public transparent so citizens' see their ideas highlighted and people's efforts are valued. Directly tie committee's or citizen input to results and final products, e.g., Capital Facilities Plan most of which has been implemented. Illustrate the whole story from theoretical approach, input, Council decisions, and how input was used and if not, why not."

Community Member Participants' Recommendations from Surveys and Interviews

1. A uniform set of guidelines and practices that drives its public involvement programs is needed at the city. Guidelines will provide direction to staff regarding the amount and type of public involvement activity appropriate for different types of projects and will promote consistency across departments.

2. A comprehensive model for public input communications is necessary, so that an individual or neighborhood can easily find out where, when and to whom they can direct concerns.

3. For plan updates and projects, provide a decision agenda that breaks down the decision-making process into smaller segments so decision junctures are more clearly outlined. Start with the big picture, the ultimate decision to be made, along with an overarching explanation of purpose. After understanding or agreeing with this big picture, the public can be asked to give input on more the specific elements that will lead to the final decision.

4. Before initiating any work together clarify the roles and responsibilities of all parties. Clarify the real role of neighborhood groups in the city's overall work, which participants see as advocates for neighborhood quality and needs. The city also needs to more clearly define and communicate its role and responsibilities to the neighborhoods, which is to address the greater good of the city, taking all neighborhoods into account.

5. The city leadership needs to identify when enough public involvement is really enough. There needs to be an understanding between the citizens and the city on the duration of an effort and what triggers a re-opening of public input.

Community Participant Response Theme 4

More meaningful public involvement activities are needed that engage citizens in productive discussion of issues before real decisions are made.

The desire for more meaningful public involvement activities was a recurring comment in citizens' survey and interview responses. Citizen participants feel there is a disconnection between how much input and what kind of input the city seeks. Some feel the city gives lots of opportunities for input, but these opportunities are often not structured to provide meaningful input or are offered to too late in the decision-making process.

Many participants commented that public involvement activities need to include more opportunities for genuine dialogue between the city and the citizens. Citizens are concerned that much of the current public involvement activities are conducted to fulfill legal requirements rather than seek ideas that might help shape the outcome of a specific project. Citizens become disheartened, cynical and angry when they learn that the real decisions have been made before any citizen input has occurred. This erodes trust in the process. Community participants were pleased that the new Planning Director has attended neighborhood meetings to listen and understand the needs of the different neighborhoods and hope other departments will do so.

Public meetings, the most commonly used form of public involvement, are frequently seen as counter productive by community participant respondents. Many complimented staff on particular public meetings that were well-run and wished all city meetings could be so productive. More often than not, the meeting format and short time for discussions frustrates citizens and staff does not get the input desired. It was noted that people who show up at public meetings tend to be the ones that have the strong opinions, vested interests, rather than a mixed representation of the general public. Overall the public meetings tend to polarize sides and other formats and input forums should be used.

Community Member Survey and Interview Comment Highlights

"We don't always use the most appropriate structure or format for our public meetings. Public Works uses "open house" format, which seems to work well. Others who use the "we talk at them" model can have a terrible time."

"Creating meaningful ways to engage and give input seem more successful than public hearings or on-way info sessions where communications often go awry or are held hostage to narrow community interests promoted by a few citizens that don't always match the needs of the greater good."

"The main problem here is that the "in-depth discussion" needs to take place at the Planning Department level, not at the public hearing level. The Planning Department does not meaningfully involve the public in discussions about growth or zoning. This is a serious problem and has created distrust of the City of Bellingham's government and high anxiety in the neighborhoods."

"Surveys and polls often ask the wrong questions, or do not leave room for open input."

Community Member Participants' Recommendations from Surveys and Interviews

1. Engage the public early in robust discussions of issues and expand the type of public involvement activities to include more genuine dialogue and debate. Find ways to have interesting discussions where everyone is enriched through mutual education —citizens learn what the city has to deal with and the city learns what concerns the citizens have.

2. Create a broader repertoire of tools for the staff to use to gather the information it needs from citizens to do a good job. Go beyond the traditional methods for public meetings to get public input. Consider using alternative formats such as the "fishbowl" session that was used to talk about growth issues in the city.

3. Broaden engagement efforts through leveraging Information Technology (IT) resources at the city, e.g., host online forums and bulletin boards for issue discussion by topic, use volunteer moderators. Online opportunities provide more equity for participation, as people do not need to get babysitters or miss work, as they must to participate at meetings.

4. Monitor and assess the effectiveness of public involvement activities on an on-going basis. Be reflective on practices and approaches. Rely on more expert analysis of methodologies that work. Use empirical objective analysis of what works and what doesn't.

5. Set up opportunities for staff and neighborhoods to conduct mutual work together. Create a climate of partnering. The Parks Department does this well; this may be more difficult to do with the Planning Department due to code limitations and regulations. Early, informal listening sessions with developers, such as the St. Joseph Hospital neighborhood effort, are one possible approach. The early meetings used to meet legal requirements are too perfunctory.

6. Broaden efforts to get representation from all citizens, not just the extremes. Consider using surveys (web-based, telephone, mail) and reach out to different citizen groups such as the Rotarians, teachers associations, etc.

7. Address the inequity of neighborhood advocacy. Working class neighborhoods have fewer disposable resources and less available time to spend advocating with the city and therefore they get lesser results, e.g., squeaky wheel gets the grease syndrome based on classism.

8. Keep half of the MNAC agenda open for discussion of agenda items. Build MNAC agendas collaboratively so issues important to neighborhoods get on the agenda. Have a timekeeper and don't fill agendas with presentations.

9. Design more effective public meetings to give citizens enough time to give quality input. Provide graphics, maps and other tools to help the citizens understand the issues and have the right staff on hand to answer questions. Make sure the meeting place is appropriate for the type and size of meeting to be held, has adequate seating, microphones, and parking.

10. Allow discussions in committees where the public can ask questions. Offer a balance between day and night meetings, large and smaller formats.

11. Promote sustained listening in neighborhoods. Demonstrate how the city is listening and provide examples of how the neighborhood is accommodating its share of growth. If the neighborhood is not accommodating its share of growth, then tell them how they can do so.

Community Participant Response Theme 5

Earlier involvement in decision-making processes and allocation of ample time to conduct public involvement efforts is desired.

Citizen assessment participants indicated that they want the city to work with the public before decisions are made. A disconnect exists between the timing of citizens input on issues and the timing of decision-making in the city. The timing of public involvement activities tends to be too late for the public to have an influence on decisions. In some instances, participants indicated that there was not sufficient time to process the public's input before decision-making and input was viewed as an impediment to getting the work done rather than a value to the project.

Citizen participants indicated that a two-week advance announcement is not enough notification time for big issues if the city wants to get feedback from the neighborhoods. An earlier timeframe is needed so neighborhoods have a chance to discuss issues within the neighborhood prior to formal comment deadlines. Neighborhood groups meet once a month and often do not have time to hold a meeting before the comment period closure or meeting date. When issues are complicated, the public also needs time to prepare.

<u>Community Member Survey and Interview Comment Highlights</u>

"Short notice to neighborhoods gets citizens involved with sense of rush, late to the table. This creates a perception with city that they [citizens] will slow things down. Who does the short-timeframe serve?"

"In many instances the public comment period was set to just the bare minimum to be in legal compliance, limiting the ability of neighbors to inform other neighbors and get their comments in during the designated time period."

"The two-week Planning Commission hearing notice is not adequate. Neighborhood groups only meet once a month and miss time to prepare. Planning Commission hears issues before neighborhoods have had any discussion (example, tandem parking issue)."

"The Planning Department does not have an advisory group to bounce ideas off of, the Planning Commission is a quasi-judicial body that cannot talk to others as part of their decision-making process. The Planning Commission is not a brainstorming forum."

<u>Community Member Participants' Recommendations from Surveys and Interviews</u>

1. Hold dialogues with citizens before concepts are cast in stone.

2. Hold public meetings in which developers explain their development plans to neighborhoods earlier in the permitting process so that citizens can help developers shape their projects.

3. When the Planning Commission's hearing schedule is made up, put information out to neighborhood presidents to disseminate. Give a six-week review and discussion time period for neighborhoods to correspond with their monthly meeting schedule. With this approach staff and neighborhoods can go to Planning Commission with meaningful considerations.

4. Set realistic expectations for project timelines that promote thoughtful participation and build confidence in the system. Time is spent one-way or another. The city often adds time to address 'problems'. Add time earlier for a more proactive environment.

5. Slow down; do the work to build consensus when something close to consensus is possible.

6. Use neighborhood groups to get community members involved before it is a hot topic.

Community Participant Response Theme 6

Citizens and city would benefit from education in which the citizens would acquire a better understanding of how local government works and the city would learn more about the specific needs of the neighborhoods.

Community assessment participants suggested it would be helpful to increase the community's understand of the basic, internal workings of the city. People do not know how decisions are made within the city, within departments and at the Council level. Citizens also need education on the restrictions these entities have to deal with, such as codes and regulations so they understand the constraints the city faces when it makes its recommendations or decisions. For example, the six-year plans and capital facilities planning processes include extensive public input, followed by budget approvals, with implementation often occurring six to ten years later. By the time a project is funded and ready to be implemented members of the public may have changed as well as other elements of community life. This longer planning cycle and the legacy of the earlier public input needs to be conveyed.

The participating community members suggested that the education forum be two-way. They would like the city, both elected officials and staff, to commit to spending more time in the neighborhoods to learn about the specific needs and concerns of the neighborhoods. The public also wants to know what the developers are thinking and wants the developers to consider citizen's concerns.

Community Member Survey and Interview Comment Highlights

"One of the biggest barriers is ignorance on the part of the public. The city is going to have to invest in educating opinion leaders and rational activists who are willing to spend the time. Those are the people with credibility in the community. The city lacks that credibility as a result of its dismal history of responding to public opinion when it conflicts with the administration's objectives."

"Neighborhood Planning Academy is a great invitation to citizens - it teaches you how the city runs and then invites you to take responsibility for getting it done."

"While the Planning Academy is a great start the curriculum has been largely developed without citizen input, which is more of the same old approach. Please refer to the Forum 2006 Recommendations to City Council, from the February 6, 2006 meeting packet re guiding principles."

"Help people to see what is available, not as an excuse, rather as clear information on choices that have to be made in departments."

Community Member Participants' Recommendations from Surveys and Interviews

1. Have other departments follow the lead of the Planning Department's new Neighborhood Planning Academy. Include citizens in the selection of topics and curriculum to be studied. Departments could ask the neighborhoods how the departments can support the neighborhoods' desires for parks, safe roadways, habitat protection, etc., rather than having it all decided inside the departments and then coming with proposals in hand for the neighborhoods to react to.

2. Consider educating citizens about what a Planning Commission is and is not able to do and how to get heard by this body. Address the misperception that plans equal protection. People need to know that protections are in codes and regulations, not neighborhood plans.

3. Consider providing a visual road map (8th grade level) of how the city decision-making process works and organize by topic. The city does highly complex work and staff has extensive technical information to offer. A message that can easily be understood by the public is needed, especially in the area of long-term planning, policy development, and the integration of community input.

4. Offer an open house at city hall once a year to all Bellingham residents for citizens to interact with city staff. The staff can educate the public about how decisions are made and what issues are being considered in that year. The public can offer ideas back to the staff.

5. Tell the story of the city as a successful business. The city is not in big debt and has accomplished many of its long-term goals.

6. Use BTV10 as a tool for educating the public about how the city runs. Special programs could highlight different departments and how they work and also cover different processes that are followed in the city.

7. Use proactive outreach activities, such as tabling at the Farmer's Market, where city staff can engage the public and help build trust and confidence. Tell the story of what the city does and has done to protect and improve our quality-of-life, use our dollars wisely, and make informed decisions.

8. Promote neighborhood-based listening sessions, in which the elected officials and department heads would go out into the neighborhoods and listen to the citizens, even if it is just one neighborhood meeting a year.

Community Participant Response Theme 7

Citizens would like more follow up after they have participated in a public involvement activity and transparency on how their input was used.

Assessment participants want to understand what has happened to their suggestions, even if the city doesn't follow their advice. Some survey and interview participants indicated that the public often has no idea what has happened to their input, whether staff has received it, whether anybody has read it, and how it may have been used in the planning process.

Citizens want to know the impact of their comments. Even if the results are not what the citizens wanted, they would like to know that they have been heard and would like to understand the reasons why their suggestions were not adopted. A better explanation of how the results of a public involvement activity will be used would be helpful at the start of a process. After input is given, communications regarding why the staff was able or not able to address specific issues could help the citizens understand and accept the process and the results. The comment response document approach used in the Shorelines Management Plan Update is an example of successful follow-up to citizen comments.

Community Member Survey and Interview Comment Highlights

"There is not enough follow through in keeping in touch with the neighborhoods. We get a good chance to get our input in the process, but then we don't hear what is happening. There is a feeling that the city listens, but doesn't necessarily seriously consider objections."

"The Parking Commission, the Public Facilities District, the Library, the Museum Board, and the Capital Projects are all engaging and successful forums. The difficulty lies in what the city does with the information gathered in these groups. There remains a serious breakdown between the groups' information to the city staff and implementation of the community discussions and input."

"After writing my comments, I did not receive any acknowledgement that my comments were received, reviewed, considered, etc. It's hard to tell if action was ever taken based on input. The lack of response is frustrating."

Community Member Participants' Recommendations from Surveys and Interviews

1. Communicate clear expectations for the public's involvement, explain the context of the comment request, and provide an overview of the whole process within which a specific public involvement activity fits. Tell the public where their comments and information is going and explain how their information will be used.

2. Make input from the public transparent so citizens' can see how their ideas have been used, which will highlight the input and increase value for people's efforts. Directly tie committees' work to the results and final staff work products. Illustrate the whole story from the concept, to public input, through Council decision, and show how input was used, and if not, why not.

3. Assign a staff person on each project who is responsible to report on the use of public input, e.g., this was done well in the Shorelines Master Plan update.

4. When staff responds to the Planning Commission or to public questions at a Planning Commission hearing, have staff explain their thoughts on the specific points raised to help citizens see the rationale behind their answers.

5. Invest more time in explaining why pivotal changes were made in the city's approach to regulations, plans or codes. More thorough explanations could defuse conflict escalation.

Community Participant Response Theme 8

Citizens would like to see an improvement in the methods the city currently uses to communicate with its citizens.

Community members we interviewed appreciate the breadth of complex information the city needs to convey to the public. Many feel the tools and methods used for communications could be improved. Specifically, people have a hard time finding information on the city's website, e.g., to find the city's newsletter you have to go to Mayor's Office page and locating a staff E-mail addresses is difficult. Participants value the outreach BTV10 provides and think the city could offer more interesting coverage of current issues, expand the variety of programming, and focus on educational programming on how the city is run.

Other examples of possible communication improvements include accessibility of important documents for citizen comment, timeliness of messages distribution to Council members so the information reaches the person's desk on time, and clearer and more thorough public meeting information so citizens have the whole picture of the project's under discussion and the potential impacts.

Community Member Survey and Interview Comment Highlights

"Citizens have a hard time finding information on the city's website."

"Televised City Council meetings are shown too late, and it's hard to find out exactly when a particular meeting will be aired. HAVING them aired is VERY important. My parents are shut-in, but stay involved and connected with their community through regular watching."

"Permitting process for a very large project was communicated by legal notice, with many permit applications for various parts of the project done separately. The city never communicated to the public about the entire project at one time, just pieces of it. The public was never invited to participate in the permitting process of a project which will affect many neighborhoods of the city for years to come."

"Simply posting public notices in the current manner does not reach even the relatively modest percentage of residents who are interested. Newspaper notices are too temporary (and perhaps too low-visibility) to be effective, and the cob.org website, which should work as a public bulletin board, is in desperate need of a redesign with user-centered design practices, including usability testing. It is so notoriously difficult to find the information you want there that it discourages all but the most dedicated activist."

Community Member Participants' Recommendations from Surveys and Interviews

1. Communicate early and often about key issues rather than waiting until the media has done poor and inaccurate reporting and gotten everyone all riled up.

2. Increase direct communication with citizens. For example, use the 'fishbowl dialogue' approach.

3. Use the most local level of organization, neighborhoods, to communicate. Give neighborhood representatives the necessary tools and resources for outreach. The top half of a communications "hourglass" has been pretty well developed, in that the staff has internally organized itself to funnel information to the neighborhood representatives. Now the city needs to support the bottom half, the neighborhoods.

4. Update the city website and make it more user-friendly. Add a 'how to effect the city,' a who/what/when primer on contact information and resources. Mail this weblink to all citizens and provide a phone contact option so that everyone has access. Create a highly usable web portal that delivers information based on neighborhood interests. This could potentially be a huge help if it were supported by a tightly focused message such as: 'Tell the city about it: www.cob.org/neighborhoods/and 'Find out what's coming: www.cob.org/neighborhoods.' The site would of course have to make it very EASY for any resident to view information directly concerning their neighborhood, which in many cases will be content relevant to many other neighborhoods or even the entire city or county.

5. Use news media as one of the city's outreach strategy to get information to citizens.

6. Enlarge the new Office of Neighborhood Services into a full department. The new Coordinator position has already provided a means for getting quicker answers to neighborhood questions, as well as efficient entree into various other city Departments. Please enlarge this 'office' into a full department.

7. Expand the radius for notification of proposed zoning changes on particular neighborhood properties. It is currently at 300 feet and needs to be significantly expanded, perhaps to 1/4 mile to truly provide notification to neighbors who will be affected. The presumption that immediate neighbors are the only ones who need to know about zoning changes is outdated.

8. Examine the level of publicity around a city announcement of invitation for public input versus a city announcement of an already made decision. Determine why one might get more attention and visibility than the other and then experiment to see if the city can do better at the 'seeking input' announcements.

9. Reinstate the city newsletter.

3.2. Staff Response Themes

Staff from the following departments participated in the Public Involvement Needs Assessment: City Council, Mayor's Office, Planning & Community Development, Public Works, and Parks and Recreation Departments. Department heads identified staff assessment participants to assure an assessment participant mix of the following levels of staff from within their department:

- Lead staff that can provide a broad picture of department goals
- Staff knowledgeable about public involvement design and implementation
- Staff involved in integrating public input into the Department's work

Of the 107 staff members selected 64 (59%) completed the electronic survey and all of the 26 staff members selected for private interviews completed their interview either in face-to-face or by phone.

The themes identified below were drawn from the survey and interview responses. Following each theme is a brief description of the issues raised, and a listing of examples from comments, and summary of their recommendations. While staff respondents shared many examples of staff and citizen commitment and work in the area of public involvement, the purpose of this report is to focus on areas for improvement. Therefore, the themes and examples describe elements of the city's public involvement practices that could be improved upon.

Staff Response Theme 1

Leadership attitudes and behavior need to reflect a genuine value and respect for public input as an important component of the information used to shape the city's work; without this all the rest of public involvement is window dressing.

Leadership commitment to and perception of public involvement as a valuable contribution to the city's work is necessary to direct and support staff efforts to engage the public. Staff indicated that leadership commitment should come from the Mayor, Council, and down into each department to convey the leaderships' interest in actively supporting public involvement activities and use of citizen input during recommendation development and final decision-making.

Assessment staff participants suggested that resource allocation is a key vehicle for communicating leadership commitment to public involvement. While the city has some very skilled staff in the area of public involvement, they are spread quite thin and don't always feel their advice is heard or followed. These individuals need to be allowed to allocate adequate time and resources to build interdepartmental teams, design and implement activities, and integrate public input early in the recommendation development process.

Many staff participants indicated that an important component of leadership commitment is a willingness to share power and influence with the public on project and policy development. While the city has had some successes in partnering with citizens and community organizations, partnering[6] is not used as widely as it could be, especially with the city's advisory boards and commissions.

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[6] See page 4 for a definition of a partnering type of public involvement activity, per assessment framework.

The review and consideration of public comments during deliberation and decision-making processes is another important demonstration of the value the city places on public input. When the public input gathered throughout the duration of a project is not valued equally with the voices heard at the end of the project, the staff's long-term public involvement program is potentially undervalued and citizens involved earlier in the process may feel disenfranchised. Staff participants suggested that the public comment period at Council meeting's on the day of voting should be valued equally with public input gathered at other stages of the process, not more, not less.

<u>Staff Survey and Interview Comment Highlights</u>

"Public involvement must be made useful to departments. The knowledge and wisdom of neighbors must be respected and accepted."

"The necessary level of resources for public involvement is underestimated thereby short circuiting the efforts and reducing quality."

"Provide better leadership in decision-making; the best thing for the public as a whole may not be what pleases a small group of people that show up to a public meeting."

"How much public involvement do we need (quantity)? How much input do we need for any given topic? When can we say enough? What level is sufficient given our finite resources and a representative government and how do we balance these?"

<u>Staff Participants' Recommendations from Surveys and Interviews</u>

1. Address how the Mayor's office interfaces with the Council and build a mutual, sincere value for public involvement at the top of the city's leadership. Determine what the city's leadership approach is concerning the public's role in city decision-making, how to get out of public involvement paralysis that keeps the decisions from being made (status quo serves some people), and how to get past the loudest voices to hear quieter majority and make decisions for the citywide needs.

2. Refresh the city's perspective on citizen involvement. We should not be afraid of citizens. We need to respect their wisdom and knowledge and respect our own staff's wisdom and knowledge. Leadership should set a unified public involvement culture, nip negativism early, and increase passion for excellence in public involvement activities and relationships with the public. Department heads need to set clear policy on public involvement standards and then lead and hold staff accountable to these standards.

3. Seek to achieve a better alignment of public involvement priorities with careful strategic planning across departments to address systemic issues and opportunities. Leadership needs to direct the necessary resources (staff time and funds) to convey their commitment to upholding public involvement efforts across the life of a project, including readiness to commit additional public involvement resources if significant changes arise in project timelines or approach. Address openly the tension between expectations of a leaner government and the reality that full, immediate access and sustained public involvement requires staffing levels that cost more.

4. Develop shared standards for public involvement across departments with a clear recognition of the unique needs of each department, phases of project and policy

development, and legal obligations. The standards should address how public involvement programs will be adapted if the focus or approach changes significantly during implementation and identify trigger points should the changes be significant enough that prior public input may no longer be fully relevant. For example, six-year plans can take ten years to acquire funding and start implementation, and during that timeframe projects can have a significant change in approach.

5. Continue with the 'One City' effort to enhance the public's experience of the city departments operating as a team. The citizens' survey is helpful, as is this assessment. Have the Council, administration, and all city departments review the findings to identify how to advance opportunities for improvement. Have staff hold one another in the best light, be problem solvers when issues come up and don't push the issue off to other departments' staff.

6. Acknowledge that the city does a good job and staff and citizens are under a lot of pressure. Bellingham is special and people demand a lot, and we need to bring public involvement to another level to reflect the important times we are in and our uniqueness as a city. Promote the concept of people contributing to change rather than reacting to it.

7. Educate city leadership on their unique role in public involvement programs. Examine the impact to a department's working partnership with community members when decision-makers step in and reverse direction of projects based on a few vocal citizens' input at the end of a longer public involvement program. If major changes in project direction are called for, consider how to re-engage citizens who participated at earlier stages. Avoid end-run approaches that promote waiting to participate until the end to engage. This conveys mixed messages to the public about when to participate, why some issues /neighborhoods get listened to and other's don't, and why some individuals/stakeholder groups seem to have more influence than others.

8. Increase citywide awareness of how Public Works Engineering Department's work interfaces across departments so all staff is informed and can appropriately engage staff in early problem solving on engineering constraints that may arise.

9. Provide time, resources and training necessary to be successful at public involvement (materials, advertising, expertise, design and implementation). Communicate to staff and the public how important public involvement is and provide resources commensurate with that.

10. Continue to encourage staff to be first class and support a positive morale. We operate with integrity and need to name and affirm our culture. We need opportunities for each employee to understand what is happening in the city and to be proud of the city. The city's quarterly meetings are a source of good information for the staff.

11. Celebrate successes with staff, advisory boards, and the community when public involvement goes well.

Staff Response Theme 2

A common philosophy and set of guiding principles for public involvement activities is needed to guide departments' development of mandated and optional public involvement activities.

The responses to survey and interview questions addressed areas for improved coordination and consistency of public involvement practices across the five participating departments. Participating staff indicated that the wide range of public involvement cultures across city departments contributes to an inconsistent experience for the public and mixed expectations of staff and city leadership. Standardized public involvement principles would improve working relationships with the public and increase consistency across departments.

Staff suggested that guiding principles regarding interdepartmental coordination, timing and duration of public input activities, and reporting practices should be general enough to encompass the broad range of public input necessary to each departments' work, e.g., early conceptual discussions for Parks planning is distinctly different from Public Works need to notify landowners of resurfacing jobs on their streets. Blanket requirements should not interfere with each department's ability to communicate with the public, yet it could enhance the city's current 'One City' campaign.

Staff indicated that standardization of public involvement practices would also be helpful for staff development. Differences from department to department can pit staff against one another when projects involve more than one city department and the city is working with a mix of public involvement goals and expectations. Leadership commitment to quality public involvement should be conveyed through specialized training and performance expectations.

Staff Survey and Interview Comment Highlights

"The Planning & Community Development Department's mandated public involvement activities are clearly outlined, yet the process leaves room for earlier public involvement activities and cross-departmental team involvement at staff's discretion. Optional activities can set up expectations that public should be involved earlier and more often throughout the duration of a project. Without consistency or guiding principles it is not clear to the public when and how these optional activities will be used and this further frustrates expectations of staff and the public."

"Public involvement activities that start with a pre-conceived outcome in mind and simply engage the public looking for consent or endorsement results in people feel steered, not heard."

"What is the shelf life of public involvement input? Some processes go on for years; people come and go. The public may not appreciate how much effort has gone into collecting data."

"Clear policy guidelines for public involvement across departments coupled with accountability will build a systemic value for public involvement. We need to be clearer on what kind of input we are asking for at various stages in the process. For example, when we need Master Plan information many of the comments revolve around detail, rather than on the larger scope."

Recommendations from Staff Participants' Surveys and Interviews

1. Develop citywide guidelines for public involvement to promote consistency across all departments. A small mixed team from staff, administration, elected officials and the public should work on the guidelines together. The guidelines should be adopted to promote leadership and accountability to the city's philosophy of public input. Guidelines or standards should support the city's philosophy on public input and identify triggers for re-opening a

public involvement process or delaying decision-making. On long-term projects, consider adding a 'what is new or different' public involvement session, that features the previous input and requests input focused on significant changes in the community, rather than a wholesale revisiting of whether or not to build or implement.

2. Clarify the goals of public input for each stage of project/ policy development before engaging the public. It will help resolve conflicts over mixed expectations within staff groups, with public and staff, and with staff, public and leadership.

3. Create a public involvement and communications checklist that outlines the project's public involvement goals and work plan, e.g., Public Works checklist. Establish clear purpose/goal for the public's involvement, require a department head signature on the approach, acquire necessary staff and resources to sustain the public involvement effort, identify key staff responsible for collating public input, and notification to the public on how the input was/ was not used. Checklist completion should be a requisite before launching the program.

4. Create a citywide public involvement training program, staff, and elected officials. Training should address the city's public involvement guidelines, goals for input at various stages of a project and/or policy development. Follow up on the initial training with skills building for strategic public involvement and a communication process for keeping other departments up-to-date on project activities. Establish a base level of skills/ attitude for all staff. Don't expect all staff to be experts at public involvement; keep technical staff focused on their strengths.

5. Develop a standard practice manual (how-to) and tool kit (physical supplies) to help staff run productive meetings. Could include a "quick reference card" that provides general guidelines on meeting approaches for various types of projects or stages of policy development. Create uniform outreach information materials, templates and style manual for administrative support staff. Create a more unified look for flyers, announcements, and memos.

6. Identify 25 key staff who are leaders in the area of public involvement from across departments and train them in advanced public involvement design. This group could serve as mentors for other staff in program design and implementation.

7. Establish opportunities for staff to work in interdepartmental teams, when appropriate, before hosting public input sessions. Teams could provide critical review of public involvement work plans, conduct a pre-session run through, and problem-solve issues.

8. Consider hiring a dedicated staff person who carries the city's public involvement initiatives out into the community. The dedicated staff person should not be a public relations or technical project staff person, rather a moderator/facilitator of public input.

9. Improve communications and information resources provided to front-line staff and managers so they understand how the city's work fits together and they can provide quick, accurate referrals to the right people in each department.

10. Educate the community on the city's public involvement guidelines and processes separate from current issues or projects so people are learning about the system when there are not actual stakes on the table and emotions are not escalated.

11. Use a cost analysis framework for developing public involvement work plans; examine the costs of staff time in relation to overall project scale and scope of impact.

Staff Response Theme 3

The city needs to actively address deteriorating working relationships between city staff and citizens and rebuild a climate of trust and partnership.

The city needs to actively improve working relationships between the many groups that work with the city: Council and administration; staff and city leadership; leadership and the public; and the staff and public. While staff respondents indicated that the city's efforts to engage the public have been successful in many forums, staff indicated an increased strain on working relationships among staff, neighborhood groups, and citizen activists.

Staff assessment participants shared that the city's many citizens' advisory boards and committees are terrific —these bodies require many hours of dedicated work, produce excellent advice, and the city really couldn't do all that it does without these invaluable volunteers. Many of the staff we spoke with expressed that these boards and committees need to have a clear purpose so people's time is well used. Some think the city could empower these groups to participate in meaningful and timely work through more clearly established roles and responsibilities.

Mixed expectations of the goals for public involvement, the timing of seeking public input, and a perceived lack of transparency were also cited by staff participants as contributing factors negatively impacting working relationships with the public. Several staff commented that some community members do not perceive staff as partners in creating community. When input is gathered later in the decision-making process, it can add to the perception that the public's input is a problem to contend with rather than an added value to the staff's work.

Participating staff suggested that all parties have an active role in promoting a climate of increased listening and positive regard for citizens as a great resource of information. Staff and city leadership need to listen to what is actually being said, not just to how it could fit in with the city's initial proposals or recommendations. A 'manufacturing consent' approach to public involvement does not promote a climate of being fully open to listening to what the community is saying. Instead, it focuses discussions on matching the public's input to the pre-established goals or simply refuting the public's suggested approach without fully explaining why it is not feasible.

Staff Survey and Interview Comment Highlights

"Before education was effective as a way to persuade people in the direction the city was going. City did not do as much listening to the public. The staff set the parameters of the discussion. City didn't get to find out what neighborhoods wanted. Today you can't do that. By prematurely removing options you create distrust."

"Community groups sense that they just need to go around staff to the Council and/or Mayor to get what they want."

"When the leadership or a city staff person believes involvement gets in the way of doing their job, it undermines the quality of the citizen/city working relationships."

"City needs to be careful that it consults not only with the public, but its own staff before making decisions at the upper level. Upper levels miss the needs and perceptions of others who may be knowledgeable about a topic."

"It's difficult to hear criticism if you don't invite it."

Staff Participants' Recommendations from Surveys and Interviews

1. Increase the number of neighborhood activities with Council members, department heads and staff participating as listeners, not presenters. Overcome distrust by taking action.

2. Shift the origination of the recommendation development toward more collegial problem solving between staff and advisory boards. Have advisory boards make initial proposals, engage staff to refine these with technical and budget level information and expertise and use an iterative process to find 'middle way solutions'. Proposals could be endorsed and sent with a list of the outstanding concerns so Council and decision-makers know how the full body of the work developed and issues were addressed.

3. Clarify for the public how each department's role in public involvement and input is different to reduce confusion and distrust regarding differences in public involvement practices. Clear, transparent communication regarding Public Works projects' timelines is needed so the public understands the department's obligation to six-year plans and the history of public input that takes place prior to the project implementation stage.

4. Encourage staff to work in teams. This can help staff loosen up ownership issues that can interfere with listening fully. Peer groups can productively challenge assumptions and ideas in advance of public input and model group problem solving and interdisciplinary views.

5. Communicate regularly and accessibly regarding public involvement activities and opportunities. Maintain BTV10 programming, perhaps profile staff and community members involved in public involvement. Watch out for technical term usage, e.g., legal notices are unclear and not user friendly.

6. Improve the speed and accuracy of information dissemination so people get what they need as directly as possible. Educate the frontline staff; consider a hotline clearinghouse or ombudsman assigned to address callers problems or concerns. When all calls get routed to the technical staff, the project momentum gets pulled away from the technical work.

7. Foster genuine community dialogue so the public does not feel it is being controlled by the city. All perspectives need to be represented. Consider using a Town Meeting model of facilitated discussion or 'fishbowl dialogue' to demonstrate how community issues can be discussed in a civil way.

8. Address the perception that staff is keeping information from the public and provide information on how public disclosure laws work. Help community members understand that staff cannot direct what elements of a document should be given out, rather citizens must direct the information request and be specific about pages and content.

9. Promote a public involvement culture that asks citizens and staff to look at the big picture and citywide needs not just preferences based on neighborhood issues or a smaller, more vocal groups.

10. Give more credit to people in the community who participate in decisions. The community needs to understand the role the public does play in helping to shape city decisions. Share ownership of the solutions by acknowledging the work of others. Explore with various boards, commissions, and committees the best way to use them and acknowledge their work.

Staff Response Theme 4

Public involvement activities should include a wider variety of venues, both formal and informal for the public to be involved.

While mandatory public hearings and formal presentations represent a high number of the city-sponsored public involvement activities, participating staff suggested a wide-variety of creative approaches to seeking public input including: open houses; forums; design charettes; citizen surveys; workshops; website comment; and E-mail. The public involvement efforts cited as most successful were often those that had significant staff and resources dedicated to support the effort (Visions for Bellingham, St. Joseph Hospital Master Plan, Waterfront Futures Group, Parks and Recreation planning efforts).

Staff assessment participants indicated that while the city does conduct about the right amount of public involvement, it is not always the right kind of activity for the issue or task, and noted that the city is often not drawing a broad mix of citizens to these activities. The public hearing, a method this is most widely used, is quite intimidating to many members of the public. The short speaker time frame of three minutes allows for sound bytes one followed by another and does not promote discussion of topics in an orderly or in-depth fashion. In addition, the listeners do not get to ask questions so miscommunications can and do arise, further undermining productive communications. Staff recommendations noted that earlier, more discussion-oriented forums have increased the quality of input given at the more formal activities. These discussion focused venues may appeal to a broader range of community members.

Survey and interview responses indicated a desire for more staffing, resources, and time to design and conduct public involvement programs. Given the city's experience in a variety of public involvement methods there are several staff members in each department that have gained significant insight into session design and discussion formats. Additional training and support is desired. Some of this support and learning can be provided internally through mentorship and teams. These seasoned staff can serve as excellent resources to fellow staff members.

<u>Staff Survey and Interview Comment Highlights</u>

"Existing structures don't result in substantive discussion on content, e.g., 3 min. public comment period."

"I have heard from citizens that they would like opportunities to offer opinions and advice in a less formal way than public hearings. They would like more chances for discussion of key issues, like growth and how to preserve neighborhood character, in order to inform public officials and themselves before issues become inflamed and controversial."

"The set up of physical space is not attended to as part of promoting productive discussions on emotionally charged issues."

"I feel that the engaging communication is done at the wrong time. Instead of doing a comprehensive public involvement prior to a project we have been trying to allow public input throughout projects which is dramatically extending the time it takes to complete the project."

<u>Staff Participants' Recommendations from Surveys and Interviews</u>

1. Hold earlier discussions prior to public hearings and promote mutual problem solving between citizens and staff. Use these sessions to promote a sense of satisfaction in the process of engagement so that satisfaction is equated with more than just getting what you want, it is also about being heard and learning from others.

2. Use a variety of meeting formats and alternatives to meetings as the way to give input to projects and plans. The Project on Public Spaces is a good start as a more creative, comprehensive way to increase working partnerships with city staff and leadership.

3. Make sure public involvement opportunities are accessible to all kinds of citizens and neighborhoods. Alternate day/night meetings and provide web-based involvement alternatives, not everyone can afford babysitters.

4. Consider conducting a random sampling of citizens on key issues as part of the public involvement process. This could provide input from a cross section of the community, not just from those citizens that are meeting oriented.

5. Increase linkages of the six-year plans, the code updates, and the planning framework and processes with the neighborhood plans.

6. Establish more venues in which the city officials come as listeners, especially informal venues.

7. Explore timing options for Council meeting work sessions and explore the format of these meetings so the public feels they have access to the Council – staff work sessions.

8. Use alternative, less intimidating forms of public involvement. Consider using PEIR web-based platform as one alternative method for public involvement.

Staff Response Theme 5

Public involvement outreach and activities need to engage a broader mix of community members.

Engagement of the more silent members of the community is important to the city. Staff members surveyed and interviewed indicated that this aspect of public involvement is extremely important. Outreach efforts and input opportunities need to reach community members that are not likely to attend day or evening meetings to insure the city is hearing from a broader diversity of citizens. The citizen survey provides one such vehicle for input; other venues should be explored to encourage input from more than the seasoned activists in the community.

Staff suggested that neighborhood organizations could play a more active role in outreach and engagement. The sequence and timing of public involvement activities should be addressed, so that efforts at the neighborhood level are not overwhelming and make sense to the ways citizens see the issues. Web-based processes may also provide viable alternatives to meetings.

Staff Survey and Interview Comment Highlights

"Leadership needs to focus on the greater needs of the community. The city needs to hear from all layers of the community. The vocal people come with extremes, those with moderate or mixed views, the city does not hear from."

"The city needs to understand how important communication is. Public does not differentiate among departments. City is guilty by association."

"I don't believe we spend enough time gathering information about our audiences prior to asking for their acceptance, approval, or behavior change."

"We need to find ways to access the silent majority who has little time but cares."

Staff Participants' Recommendations from Surveys and Interviews

1. Improve equity of neighborhoods and community members' access to staff and input on public involvement activities. Some neighborhoods have greater resources (financial, free time, babysitters, etc.) that allow residents to attend night meetings. Create project specific web-based public involvement portals to increase access for all. Consider a comment submission, E-mail question/ answer system. This would reduce the sense of inequity.

2. Keep staff apprised of the neighborhoods' experience with the city. Have staff identify overlapping areas of current work projects and potential neighborhood proximities that may extend the public involvement outreach areas. Consider other departments' current work projects and potential impacts on community interest and availability.

3. Update the notification database that is used for public involvement announcements. The County Auditor's database is used to generate labels but this office does not have a standardized format for owner entries. In addition, announcements do not get to renters who are also affected. Consider using flyers in apartment buildings in addition to postal mailings.

4. Establish accountability for MNAC representatives to do thorough outreach and engagement within neighborhoods with the goal to expand beyond more than the allies on an issue.

5. Post signage on future facilities sites earlier so people are informed well before formal meetings and activities.

6. Send a 'save the date' notice three weeks before the meeting date. Follow-up with a quick meeting reminder closer to the date. Watch out for technical term usage, legal notices are unclear and not user friendly.

7. Continue to use the 'Hot Topics' section on the website; it is working well.

Staff Response Theme 6

Increased citizen understanding of how local government works and staff understanding of the public's role in local governance is needed to create more effective working relationships.

Survey and interview respondents indicated that mixed expectations regarding the focus and purpose of the public's input may contribute to confusion and dissatisfaction in public involvement experiences. Staff suggested educational efforts, for both citizens and staff, could help to clarify expectations and enhance this important partnership —that of citizens and city staff at all levels. The Citizens Police Academy and the Planning Academy were cited as good examples of citizen-level education, a civics 101 of sorts.

Variations in mandatory and optional public involvement responsibilities throughout the course of projects and policy development are confusing and contribute to the mix of expectations. Staff we spoke with indicated the community needs more information on the function of public input throughout the life of a project or policy and the reason that there are variations across city departments. There is not a one-size-fits-all public involvement protocol and the public needs to both understand and appreciate why this is. Staff participants suggested public education on citizen involvement in master plans, larger capital projects, and policy updates would be beneficial.

Staff interviews and surveys also indicated the city needs to clarify expectations across all levels of staff. This could be achieved through a combination of education and increased coordination. Staff education on the function of mandatory public involvement and the appropriate applications for additional, optional activities, could increase understanding and consistency. If the city does establish public involvement standards or guidelines, staff participants requested the city also establish a training program designed to increase staff awareness and build the necessary skills to uphold such standards.

In the area of coordination, some staff respondents suggested that the complexity of planning and regulatory codes is extended in part to the disjointed state of the various plans and codes. Prioritizing this internal work could reduce the general confusion of citizens and staff.

Staff Survey and Interview Comment Highlights

"St. Joseph Hospital planning program and public's early engagement is an example of a program done well, as were the early neighborhood meetings with the Barkley Village development."

"Planning permitting process is so complex, it can be overwhelming to people. Coordination of codes, regulations could simplify things."

"By the time projects on the Six Year Plan get to the implementation stage, significant public involvement, Council review and budget approval has taken place. Clarity is needed on the goals of public input at this stage of Public Works projects so that long-term planning is not unduly delayed or reversed."

"Early involvement of neighborhood groups is important and is easily done when a large development is being done by one organization. In the case of Fairhaven's explosion of growth, the number of developers makes it hard to develop a coordinated early effort."

Staff Participants:

1. Create public education materials to increase community understanding of local government, complex planning activities, and the status of projects and activities.

Possible tools include:
- a. Civics 101 - how city government works for you, civic process, legal and state requirements on publicly funded project decision-making and implementation.
- b. Planning Academy and Budget Advisory Committee are examples of different ways to create a co- learner environment. Groups like this can increase the public's understanding of what is possible with government resources and public input.
- c. Create a monthly capital projects update, post it on the website, or E-mail to neighborhood groups and individuals who sign up for information on certain topics or geographic areas.
- d. Add a column to the "Just so you are aware" publication that educates the public on long-term planning tools, such as the six-year plans, Capital Facilities Plan, etc.
- e. Add short features on staff that provide key services within the City's departments, to existing publications e.g., who to turn to.
- f. Be creative in outreach and educational forums, e.g., at construction sites place signage or realtor boxes with brief handouts. This gets information to citizens that have interest in a project area but do not live within the formal notification area.
- g. Add to the Parks & Recreation Leisure Guide highlights from the Parks Annual Work Plan, include key projects in the long-term facilities plan and trail activities.
- h. Continue the BTV10 magazine show; create episodes on top projects for the year and issues. Repeat programming to get at audiences throughout all times of day.

2. Update the planning codes and make these revisions consistent with regulations and other comprehensive planning documents. This would increase coordination and reduce the extra work and confusion created by the disjointed state of codes and the plans.

3. Create an internal tracking system that outlines the path of a project, provides updates on project status, features public involvement activities hosted, notes location of input collected, and outlines the next steps for public and staff action.

4. Identify a common central location for projects, information-clearinghouse, so citizens can access accurate, up-to-date information easily.

5. Engage the public in telling the city how the website could be a more effective education tool and provide access for all types of users. Suggestions include:
- a. Add a mapping function to website that allows users to see where projects are taking place and have educational links on the project, related codes, regulations, and public involvement opportunities.
- b. Post the staff reports to the Council on the city's website so public has access to materials outside of attending a meeting. Broaden access to all who might like the information.
- c. Add a neighborhood focus to the website, a page or link for each neighborhood that shows what is going on with each of the departments in this part of town.
- d. Add a 'running banner' to the home page showing city-sponsored meetings, times and topics. This keeps people from having to drill into project specific sub-pages.
- e. Add a community member sign-up form to the website so people can get added to project information distribution lists without having to attend meetings to do so.
- f. Use the website for the staff to post frequently asked questions for the public's benefit. Give staff a form to make it easier to post information.

6. Increase media relations so local media outlets covers projects and educational topics with accurate information. Consider having a regular column by the Planning Director and other department heads.

7. Increase interdepartmental communication from upper levels of government about major projects underway, e.g., summarize the department heads reports for all staff.

8. When conflict arises, provide all staff with a fact sheet to minimize misunderstanding and provide information on where to get more information.

9. Have the communications department put together a book on the different ways public officials can get public input, including how to structure public involvement for different circumstances, encouraging two-way discussions, and alternatives to the public hearing that would be new, welcoming, and meaningful.

10. Use surveys and focus groups to determine what is working, and what is not for both the quantity and quality of our public involvement. The city needs to know if it is facilitating better decisions by spending more time or just consuming more time. Both staff and public perceptions are needed to determine this. Consider more rigorous assessments activities and programs including evaluations of specific public involvement sessions. Explore ways to get better feedback from the public on an on-going basis.

11. Rely on past experience of what has worked and consider the lessons learned from the Hans Bleiker training.

4. Conclusions and Next Steps

The Public Involvement Assessment invited participants to thoughtfully reflect on their personal experiences and they did so with passion, intelligence and creativity. The assessment produced a considerable amount of information on the city's public involvement practices as perceived by participating city staff and community members. The individuals we interviewed and surveyed brought a wealth of experience and candor about the city's practices, their perceptions on what has been done well, and suggestions on what could be done better. The recommendations outlined in this report bring forward key themes from the assessment participants' responses and should not be interpreted as representing the view of all City of Bellingham staff or all Bellingham community members as a whole.

The City of Bellingham Public Involvement Assessment is one component of a larger city endeavor to improve involvement of citizens in the decisions that affect them. The recommendations outlined in this report seek to address the city's intent to identify opportunities to improve current practices, coordination and consistency, and staff training in the area of public involvement. The Public Involvement Assessment Report, along with the Customer Satisfaction and Service Priorities telephone survey conducted in June 2006 will be used by the city to develop an action plan for public involvement program improvements in 2007.

Throughout this assessment we have held an assumption —that quality public involvement is not simply achieved by adding more activities. What we have heard from the assessment participants is that quality public involvement is planned purposefully, designed to reach a broad mix of the community, and supported with the necessary time, resources, and attention for a meaningful exchange of ideas prior to decision-making. Responses indicated that the City of Bellingham offers an incredible variety of public involvement opportunities and is very creative in the methods and activities used. Given the limited scope of this assessment project, the report focuses on those areas identified for improvement.

The City of Bellingham has a rich history of public involvement and is fortunate to have such excellent staff and so many citizens with a desire to be involved. It is encouraging to see the similarities between staff and community responses regarding the areas for improvement and suggestions on how these improvements might be accomplished. These are all the right ingredients for a highly productive working partnership. It is our hope that the city will seize this moment to engage community members and staff at all levels in a joint review of the findings to identify mutual goals for public involvement quality and effectiveness and early and long-term actions that will support these goals.

Appendix A.   Assessment Design, Methods, and Analysis

The Public Involvement Assessment was conducted to provide the City of Bellingham insight on how to more effectively involve the public in various stages of the policy-making and project implementation cycles. Specifically, the city sought to identify opportunities to improve:

- Current practices, with an emphasis on potential guidelines for future public involvement programs and activities,
- Coordination and consistency across departments, and
- Training for increased staff expertise in public involvement.

Working within a limited scope and resources, the assessment was not intended to be a comprehensive evaluation of all public involvement activities conducted by the City of Bellingham. The assessment was designed to engage two respondent groups in reflecting on the city's public involvement practices: 1) key staff members who conduct ongoing public involvement for the following five departments which have recurring public involvement activities: City Council, Mayor's Office, Planning & Community Development, Public Works, and Parks & Recreation, and 2) community members who are recognized by their peers as having a high-level of experience in city-sponsored public involvement activities with these departments.

The assessment consisted of two methods of information gathering. The first tool was an electronic survey posted on the city's PIER platform, see Appendix B for the survey questionnaire. The second tool was personal interviews as a follow-up to the surveys, see Appendix C for the interview questions. Personal interviews were conducted either face-to-face or by phone.

<u>Community Member Assessment Participant Identification and Selection</u>

The Mayor's Neighborhood Advisory Commission (MNAC) and the Association of Bellingham Neighborhoods Board (ABN) were asked to nominate a total of 20 individuals for involvement in face-to-face interviews and electronic survey components of the, using the criteria below. As more than 20 interviewees were nominated, Malcolm Fleming, Chief Financial Administrator, selected the final interview participants using this criteria.

All community members nominated for interviews were included in the electronic survey component of the assessment. Additional community members were selected for participation in the survey from the city's current rosters of advisory boards, committees and commissions working with each of the five participating departments. A total of 130 community members were selected for participation in the electronic survey and 20 of the 130 were selected for interviews.

Criteria for Interview and Electronic Survey Community Member Participant Selection
  Participants are:
- Geographically distributed across Bellingham's many neighborhoods
- Veterans of the city's public involvement activities at the neighborhood or citywide scale (have familiarity and 'on the ground/ in the trenches' experience to draw from)
- Active members of MNAC, ABN, or their own neighborhood association
- Comprised of a mix from these three groups of stakeholders
- Available to commit 1.5 hours to participate in the assessment (complete an electronic survey and conduct a face-to-face interview before September 15)
-

Staff Assessment Participant Identification and Selection

City staff from each of the following departments participated in the Public Involvement Needs Assessment: City Council, Mayor's Office, Planning & Community Development, Public Works, and Parks and Recreation Departments. Department heads were asked to identify staff members for participation using the following selection criteria. A total of 107 staff from the five participating departments were selected for participation in the electronic survey and 26 of the 107 staff were identified for participation in interviews.

Criteria for Interview and Electronic Survey Staff Participant Selection
    Each department's participant group should reflect a mix of staff from the following groups:
    - Lead staff that can provide a broad picture of department goals
    - Staff knowledgeable about public involvement design and implementation
    - Staff involved in integrating public input into the Department's work

Methods and Analysis

Assessment participants included those city staff and community members most closely involved with city-sponsored public involvement. Selected survey participants were invited to engage through personal E-mail communications and were provided an instructional sheet outlining the purpose of the assessment and how to access the electronic survey on the city's PIER platform. Personal interviews were scheduled with the 20 community members and 26 staff participants and conducted following their completion of the survey. These interviews lasted from 45 minutes to one hour and were conducted in person at city offices or by phone. To encourage full participation E-mail reminders were sent to all invited participants encouraging them to complete the survey or interview, as well as notification of the deadline for participation.

Of the 130 community members selected for participation in the assessment, 55 completed the electronic survey (42%), and 18 of the 20 (90%) selected for interviews, completed their private interview either face-to-face or by phone. Of the 107 staff members selected 64 (59%) completed the electronic survey and all of the 26 staff members selected for private interviews completed their interview either face-to-face or by phone.

The assessment produced a considerable amount of information on the city's public involvement practices. The consultant team reviewed over 170 pages of responses from the 116 surveys and over 43 hours of interviews to identify key themes from each participant group. Given the limited scope of the assessment project the findings were focused on areas for improvement. Themes outlined in Section 3: Participant Response Themes reflect participants' suggestions for how public involvement practices could be improved upon. Consultant team recommendations in Section 2 were developed based upon two factors: 1) frequency of reference to this area of improvement in both community member and staff surveys and interviews, and 2) practical opportunities for city-initiated action with the potential for positive affects on the quality of public involvement activities and effectiveness of citizen input. The consultant team drew upon their collective experience of over 48 years of practice in the field of public involvement to conduct this work.

Consultant team recommendations and the key themes from each of the participant groups were included to increase understanding of the similarities that were found in both group's responses. It should be noted that while the report focuses on areas for improvement, survey and interview respondents expressed a high regard for the city's staff and included many examples of city-sponsored public involvement activities that have been highly successful and responsive to community members' input.

Appendix B.   Survey Questionnaires

Survey Definitions
Both community and staff survey participants were provided the following definitions to support their completion of the electronic survey.

For the purposes of this survey, the public is defined as:
- members of the general public (unorganized),
- interested stakeholders (interested citizens and organized constituency groups), and/or
- consultants and/or attorneys representing any of the above.

Public Involvement Methods and Activities Terminology:

Communications: A one-way information exchange in which the city provides information to the public to inform or educate, e.g., mailings, web postings, television programs, newspaper articles.

Listening: A one-way information exchange in which the city gathers information from the public through various methods, e.g., surveys, phone polls, market research, web-based polls.

Consulting: A brief event in which the city invites the public to discuss information on policies, projects or programs that have not been finalized, e.g., neighborhood meetings, workshops, open houses, design charettes.

Engaging: An ongoing forum in which the city engages the public in in-depth discussions about the issues, e.g., Advisory Boards, Commissions, stakeholder groups.

Partnering: City and community groups sharing responsibility to develop policy, program, or project decisions, e.g., Depot Market Square, where design decisions were shared with the Design Committee.

Community Participant Survey Questions

1) The city uses a variety of approaches to involve the public in policy or project design and implementation. Please indicate which of the following method(s) you have found successful (Select all that apply)

    ___Communication
    ___Listening
    ___Consulting
    ___Engaging
    ___Partnering

2) If you selected COMMUNICATIONS above, please name at least one project that you believe was a successful COMMUNICATIONS project, and share a brief explanation of why it was successful

3) If you selected LISTENING above, please name at least one project that you believe was a successful LISTENING project, and share a brief explanation of why it was successful.

4) If you selected CONSULTING above, please name at least one project that you believe was a successful CONSULTING project, and share a brief explanation of why it was successful.

5) If you selected ENGAGING above, please name at least one project that you believe was a successful ENGAGING project, and share a brief explanation of why it was successful.

6) If you selected PARTNERING above, please name at least one project that you believe was a successful PARTNERING project, and share a brief explanation of why it was successful.

7) How many public involvement activities sponsored by the city have you participated in during the past year? (See above and "Survey Tip Sheet" for examples of activities)

        ___1-5
        ___6-10
        ___11-15
        ___16-20
        ___21 or more

8) In your view, which of the following have been primary goal(s) of public involvement activities in the city? (Select all that apply)

        ___Providing information to the public
        ___Gathering information from the public
        ___Exchanging information
        ___Developing common understanding
        ___Creating mutually acceptable options
        ___Reaching agreements about policy or programs

9) With the goal of effective and productive public involvement in the city, I feel the city does: (Select all that represent your thoughts)

        ___Too much public involvement (redundant or overlapping activities)
        ___About the right amount of public involvement (right fit / right time)
        ___Not enough public involvement (too little / too late)
        ___Not the right kind of public involvement (wrong activity for the issue / task)

10) Earlier in the survey we asked which approaches to public involvement have been successful for the city. Now we would like to know which methods have been less successful. Please indicate which of the following method(s) you have found less than effective. (Select all that apply)

        ___Communication
        ___Listening
        ___Consulting
        ___Engaging
        ___Partnering

11) If you selected COMMUNICATIONS above, please name at least one project that you believe was a less-than-effective COMMUNICATIONS project, and share a brief explanation of why it was less effective.

12) If you selected LISTENING above, please name at least one project that you believe was a less-than-effective LISTENING project, and share a brief explanation of why it was less effective.

13) If you selected CONSULTING above, please name at least one project that you believe was a less-than-effective CONSULTING project, and share a brief explanation of why it was less effective.

14) If you selected ENGAGING above, please name at least one project that you believe was a less-than-effective ENGAGING project, and share a brief explanation of why it was less effective.

15) If you selected PARTNERING above, please name at least one project that you believe was a less-than-effective PARTNERING project, and share a brief explanation of why it was less effective.

16) Current strengths of the city's public involvement activities include: (Select all that apply)

        ___Number of citizens involved
        ___Satisfaction of the public
        ___Quality of activities
        ___Quality of public input
        ___Integration of public input
        ___Other

17) If you chose "other" above, list other strengths here. (Please be specific)

18) Current weaknesses of our public involvement activities include: (Select all that apply)

        ___Not drawing in the right people into public involvement activities
        ___Mixed expectations of public participants regarding the goals and purpose of the public
          involvement activity
        ___Lack of understanding among staff of the value of public involvement
        ___Lack of good process models for effective public involvement
        ___Adequate staffing, resources, and time to conduct, report, and integrate input
        ___Lack of staff training in the skills of public involvement
        ___Other

19) If you chose "other" above, list other weaknesses here. (Please be specific)

20) If the city could do one or two things to improve public involvement activities what would they be?

21) How well do you think the city integrates information gathered from the public into its formal work product development and/or decision-making processes?

        ___Extremely well
        ___Good job
        ___Satisfactory
        ___Poorly
        ___Not at all

22) Current barriers to coordination and consistency of public involvement activities across city departments include:

23) Your suggestions for increasing coordination and consistency of public involvement activities across departments include:

24) What do you think would increase the civility of dialogue at public meetings, work sessions and other public involvement activities?

25) Please select below those areas in which you feel the city provides adequate support and resources. (Select all that apply)

     ___Staff time for public involvement program design and preparation
     ___Resources to develop and distribute necessary information materials
     ___Time for public input during public involvement sponsored activities
     ___Staff time to compile public input and integrate into work products
     ___None of the above have adequate resources

26) I would like to see city staff improve skills and knowledge in the following areas: (Select all that apply)

     ___Designing and running productive meetings
     ___Determining what type(s) of public involvement is called for
     ___Working more productively with the public
     ___Dealing with procedural and substantive challenges
     ___Planning a public involvement process that involves the public at key junctures
     ___Presentation skills/ public speaking
     ___Effective outreach materials and campaigns
     ___Stand-up facilitation for large public meetings and workshops
     ___Dealing with value differences
     ___Other

27) If you chose "other" above, list other areas of training you would like here. (Please be specific)

28) If you have other suggestions for improving city public involvement activities, please describe them here. (Please be specific)

Staff Participant Survey Questions

1) The city uses a variety of approaches to involve the public in policy or project design and implementation. Please indicate which of the following method(s) you have found successful in your department. (Select all that apply)

     ___Communication
     ___Listening
     ___Consulting
     ___Engaging
     ___Partnering

2) If you selected COMMUNICATIONS above, please name at least one project that you believe was a successful COMMUNICATIONS project, and share a brief explanation of why it was successful

3) If you selected LISTENING above, please name at least one project that you believe was a successful LISTENING project, and share a brief explanation of why it was successful.

4) If you selected CONSULTING above, please name at least one project that you believe was a successful CONSULTING project, and share a brief explanation of why it was successful.

5) If you selected ENGAGING above, please name at least one project that you believe was a successful ENGAGING project, and share a brief explanation of why it was successful.

6) If you selected PARTNERING above, please name at least one project that you believe was a successful PARTNERING project, and share a brief explanation of why it was successful.

7) How much of your professional time is spent planning, organizing, promoting, and/or leading city public involvement activities? (See "Survey Tip Sheet" for examples of activities)

       ___Less than 10%
       ___11-30%
       ___30-50%
       ___Over 50%

8) Which of the following have been primary goal(s) of public involvement activities in your department? (Select all that apply)

       ___Providing information to the public
       ___Gathering information from the public
       ___Exchanging information
       ___Developing common understanding
       ___Creating mutually acceptable options
       ___Reaching agreements about policy or programs

9) With the goal of effective and productive public involvement in the city, I feel the city does: (Select all that represent your thoughts)

       ___Too much public involvement (redundant or overlapping activities)
       ___About the right amount of public involvement (right fit / right time)
       ___Not enough public involvement (too little / too late)
       ___Not the right kind of public involvement (wrong activity for the issue / task)

10) Earlier in the survey we asked which approaches to public involvement have been successful for the city. Now we would like to know which methods have been less successful. Please indicate which of the following method(s) you have found less than effective. (Select all that apply)

       ___Communication
       ___Listening
       ___Consulting
       ___Engaging
       ___Partnering

11) If you selected COMMUNICATIONS above, please name at least one project that you believe was a less-than-effective COMMUNICATIONS project, and share a brief explanation of why it was less effective.

12) If you selected LISTENING above, please name at least one project that you believe was a less-than-effective LISTENING project, and share a brief explanation of why it was less effective.

13) If you selected CONSULTING above, please name at least one project that you believe was a less-than-effective CONSULTING project, and share a brief explanation of why it was less effective.

14) If you selected ENGAGING above, please name at least one project that you believe was a less-than-effective ENGAGING project, and share a brief explanation of why it was less effective.

15) If you selected PARTNERING above, please name at least one project that you believe was a less-than-effective PARTNERING project, and share a brief explanation of why it was less effective.

16) Current strengths of the city's public involvement activities include: (Select all that apply)

      ___Number of citizens involved
      ___Satisfaction of the public
      ___Quality of activities
      ___Quality of public input
      ___Integration of public input
      ___Other

17) If you chose "other" above, list other strengths here. (Please be specific)

18) Current weaknesses of our public involvement activities include: (Select all that apply)

      ___Not drawing in the right people into public involvement activities
      ___Mixed expectations of public participants regarding the goals and purpose of the public involvement activity
      ___Lack of understanding among staff of the value of public involvement
      ___Lack of good process models for effective public involvement
      ___Adequate staffing, resources, and time to conduct, report, and integrate input
      ___Lack of staff training in the skills of public involvement
      ___Other

19) If you chose "other" above, list other weaknesses here. (Please be specific)

20) How can the city best improve public involvement opportunities for the general public?

21) How well do you think your department integrates information gathered from the public into its formal work product development and/or decision-making processes?

      ___Extremely well
      ___Good job
      ___Satisfactory
      ___Poorly
      ___Not at all

22) Current barriers to coordination and consistency of public involvement activities across departments include:

23) Your suggestions for increasing coordination and consistency of public involvement activities across departments include:

24) What do you think would increase the civility of dialogue at public meetings, work sessions and other public involvement activities?

25) Please select below those areas in which you feel your department provides adequate support and resources. (Select all that apply)

      ___Staff time for public involvement program design and preparation
      ___Resources to develop and distribute necessary information materials
      ___Time for public input during public involvement sponsored activities
      ___Staff time to compile public input and integrate into work products
      ___None of the above have adequate resources

26) Choose the topics below that you would like to see future staff training sessions address, as a way to improve the effectiveness of public involvement. (Select all that apply)

      ___Designing and running productive meetings
      ___Determining what type(s) of public involvement is called for
      ___Working more productively with the public
      ___Dealing with procedural and substantive challenges
      ___Planning a public involvement process that involves the public at key junctures
      ___Presentation skills/ public speaking
      ___Effective outreach materials and campaigns
      ___Stand-up facilitation for large public meetings and workshops
      ___Dealing with value differences
      ___Other

27) If you chose "other" above, list other areas of training you would like here. (Please be specific)

28) If you have other suggestions for improving city public involvement activities, please describe them here (Please be specific)

Appendix C.   Interview Questions

The following script was used to conduct private interviews with the community members and staff participants.

Introduction
Thank you for taking the time to be interviewed and for [taking my call/meeting with] me today.

As you know the city is conducting a needs assessment to:
- Identify opportunities to improve the quality of public involvement, including increased coordination of public involvement activities within and across departments, and
- Identify training objectives for increasing city expertise in public involvement design and implementation.

I am interested in your perspectives related to Bellingham's public involvement activities, goals and methods.

Questions
1. What do you think are the key issue(s) around providing quality public involvement for the city of Bellingham? (Issues/problems that need to be solved to provide a quality program.)

2. How would you recommend the city address [this/these] issue(s)/problem(s)?

3. What specific advice do you have to improve coordination of city sponsored public involvement activities? (Either within /or between departments?)

4. Staff: I am interested in your view of the city's current training in public involvement. What training would you like the city to receive to prepare them to design and implement quality public involvement?

   Citizens: I don't know how familiar you are with the city's current training in the area of public involvement…What would you like to see the city's training include to improve the city's ability to engage in the design and implementation of effective public involvement?

   (In addition to training, can you give us some other suggestions that would improve the quality of public involvement?)

5. In summary, I would be interested in any additional advice you would like to give the city to help improve the quality of its public involvement?