Public Participation Plan
Proposed Text

Purpose

The purpose of this Public Participation Plan (PPP) is to ensure that residents, business owners, developers, and other stakeholders are actively and meaningfully involved in the Village's planning, zoning, and redevelopment decisions. Public participation is not only a legal requirement under Michigan law, but essential to successful managed growth. This plan outlines policies and strategies to enhance transparency, foster trust, and empower citizens to contribute to the future of our community.

The Village of Northport is committed to creating a predictable, inclusive, and transparent development review process. This plan provides developers and the public with a clear understanding of how and when engagement will occur, as well as how public input will be gathered, utilized, and shared. This plan focuses on planning, zoning, and land use-related decisions and is an important part of the Village's broader efforts to foster civic engagement.

Goals

The Village of Northport Planning Commission has adopted the following goals to guide public participation efforts:

- Foster early and continuous involvement in planning and zoning matters to ensure that public input is meaningfully incorporated before decisions are finalized.
- Ensure transparency in decision-making through timely, accessible communication and multiple opportunities for public feedback.
- Promote inclusive and equitable engagement by reaching a wide range of residents, including full-time and seasonal populations, youth, seniors, business owners, and historically underrepresented groups.
- Utilize a range of outreach methods, including traditional, digital, and face-to-face engagement strategies, to ensure accessibility for all community members.
- Provide educational materials and tools to help residents understand the planning and development process, increasing the quality and relevance of public input.
- Encourage regional collaboration by working with the Leelanau Township, county entities, Northport Public School, and civic organizations to share data and build capacity for collective decision-making.
- Close the feedback loop by clearly communicating how public input influenced outcomes and decisions.
- Encourage developers to engage the public early in the development process and support efforts that foster community trust and transparency.
- Review and improve the plan regularly to reflect evolving best practices, community expectations, and technological tools.

Legal and Policy Framework

The Village of Northport is committed to maintaining compliance with federal and state laws governing public participation while striving to exceed minimum requirements through proactive and inclusive practices. This section outlines the legal foundation for public engagement and the policies that support transparent, accessible governance.

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State and Local Legal Framework

The Village's public participation activities are guided by a range of statutes and regulations that require transparency, public notice, and access to decision-making processes. These include:

- Michigan Open Meetings Act (PA 267 of 1976)
- Michigan Planning Enabling Act (PA 33 of 2008)
- Michigan Zoning Enabling Act (PA 110 of 2006)
- General Law Village Act (PA 3 of 1895)
- Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) (PA 442 of 1976)
- Brownfield Redevelopment Financing Act
- Local Historic Districts Act (PA 169 of 1970)
- Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)
- Title VI of the Civil Rights Act

These statutes ensure that meetings are open to the public, that adequate notice is provided, that residents have the opportunity to comment, and that documents and decisions are transparent and accessible.

1. Open Meetings Act Compliance

In accordance with the Michigan Open Meetings Act (OMA), the Village posts notices of all regular and special meetings at the Village Office, Post Office and on its website. Meetings are held at 116 W. Nagonaba Street, which is accessible to individuals with disabilities. The Village Clerk posts an annual schedule of regular meetings within 10 days of the first meeting of the year and updates postings in the event of schedule changes. Notices for special meetings are posted at least 18 hours in advance.

2. Planning and Zoning Statutory Requirements

The Village complies with the Michigan Planning Enabling Act, which requires notice and outreach to key stakeholders during the master planning process. When initiating a new master plan, the Planning Commission notifies the following entities by first-class mail or email:

- Leelanau County Planning Commission
- Leelanau Township
- Leelanau County Road Commission
- Public utility providers
- Michigan Department of Transportation

3. FOIA and Records Accessibility

The Village responds to FOIA requests as required by state law and provides accessible copies of agendas, minutes, ordinances, and public hearing notices. These are made available in person, via email, or through the Village website.

4. Accessibility and Language Compliance

The Village will make reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities upon request and will provide translation or interpretation services as needed to ensure equitable access to public processes. Requests should be directed to the Village Clerk in advance of meetings or public events.

Stakeholder Identification and Roles

The Village of Northport recognizes that meaningful public participation depends on identifying and engaging a wide range of stakeholders. These individuals, groups, and organizations represent the diverse interests of the community and bring valuable perspectives to planning, zoning, and development discussions. Engagement efforts must be tailored to ensure stakeholders are informed, included, and empowered to contribute throughout the decisionmaking process.

1. Who Are Stakeholders?

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Stakeholders are defined as individuals, organizations, or agencies that are affected by or have a vested interest in planning, land use, infrastructure, and redevelopment decisions within the Village. They may be involved directly or indirectly, and their input helps guide policy, project design, and community goals. Stakeholder groups include, but are not limited to:

Local Government Entities
• Village Council
• Planning Commission
• Zoning Board of Appeals
• Harbor Commission
• All other Village-appointed boards and committees

Partnering Jurisdictions and Agencies
• Leelanau Township
• Leelanau County and the Leelanau County Planning Commission
• Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians
• Leelanau County Road Commission
• Michigan Department of Transportation
• Northport Public School
• Leelanau Township Library

Community Organizations and Nonprofits
• Northport Arts Association
• Northport Performing Arts Association
• Northport Lions Club
• Leelanau Township Community Foundation
• Leelanau Township Leadership Team
. Leelanau UnCaged
• Northport Area Heritage Association
• Northport Community Events
• Northport School PTA

Business and Economic Stakeholders
• Local business owners (including retail, service, and manufacturing sectors)
• Short-term rental (STR) owners
• Farmers and agricultural businesses
• Real estate professionals and developers
• Property managers and investors

Residents and Community Members
• Full-time residents
• Seasonal and part-time residents
• Renters and landlords
• Neighborhood associations and informal community groups
• Youth and students
• Families and school staff
• Seniors and retirees
• Individuals with disabilities
• Low-income or housing-insecure residents

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• Remote workers and digital commuters
• Visitors and transitional populations (such as tourists and seasonal harbor users)

Special attention will be given to reaching groups that have historically been excluded or underrepresented in civic processes. This includes residents facing socio-economic barriers, individuals with limited English proficiency, youth, and others who may not regularly engage in public meetings.

How Stakeholders Are Engaged
The Village will tailor its engagement strategies to match the needs, availability, and interests of different stakeholder groups. Some stakeholders may be invited to public hearings or focus groups, while others may be engaged through surveys, walkabouts, or informal outreach at local events. Developers will also be encouraged to engage neighbors and stakeholders early in the process when proposing new projects.
The Village will maintain contact lists and partnership networks to ensure stakeholders are notified of opportunities to participate in master planning, zoning updates, development projects, and related community conversations. These lists will be updated regularly and used to distribute notices, surveys, meeting invitations, and project updates.

The Role of Stakeholders
Stakeholders help shape policies and priorities by sharing their lived experience, offering feedback on draft plans and proposals, and raising concerns or opportunities that may otherwise go unnoticed. Their participation strengthens transparency, improves public trust, and results in better-informed decisions that reflect a more complete picture of community needs and values.

Communication Toolbox and Engagement Methods

The Village of Northport employs a diverse range of communication tools and engagement methods designed to effectively and inclusively reach residents, businesses, and other stakeholders. This toolbox includes both traditional and digital channels to ensure full access and participation.

1. Traditional In-Person Engagement

• Public hearings and Council/Planning Commission meetings
    o Held at the Village Office or another fully ADA accessible site with in-person and Zoom options. Notices and agendas are published via the Village website and local newspaper.
• Open houses, charrettes, and design workshops
    o Used for major planning initiatives such as master plan updates or downtown redevelopment. These workshops involve stakeholders in visioning and design exercises.
• Pop-up booths and walkabouts
    o Staff attend community events (such as UnCaged, Music in the Park, etc.) to gather informal input and answer questions in a casual setting.
• Focus groups and stakeholder interviews
    o Targeted outreach for specific issues or demographics, like youth groups or business owners, to gather detailed feedback on proposed projects.

2. Digital and Remote Engagement

• Village website
    o Central hub for PPP documentation, meeting schedules, project updates, downloadable materials, and public comment forms.

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• Livestreaming and recorded meeting archives
    o Past meetings are archived online, and future hybrid meetings are accessible via Zoom.
• Online surveys and polls
    o Tools like SurveyMonkey are used to collect community feedback. Results are summarized in public reports.
• Email newsletters and alerts
    o Villagers who subscribe receive regular updates on planning initiatives and upcoming engagement opportunities.
• Social media platforms
    o Facebook is used to provide visual highlights, share event reminders, and link to online surveys.

3. Written and Visual Materials

• Newsletters and mailers
    o Information on key planning topics or upcoming open houses may be included in the Village newsletter or sent via postcard to households in affected areas.
• Printable materials
    o Flyers, poster boards, and handouts are designed for clarity, with summary graphics and access to information.
• Email blasts
    o Stakeholder lists receive tailored emails about planning events or comment deadlines relevant to their interests.

4. Tips for Effective Outreach

• Combine multiple communication channels for each engagement activity to ensure maximum reach and inclusivity.
• Offer materials in large print and other accessible formats according to ADA guidelines.
• Provide language interpretation or translation when needed.
• Schedule events at varying times and locations to accommodate different schedules andpopulations.
• Utilize visualized content, such as infographics or story maps, to help convey complex planning information, and link these resources online.

Project-Specific Outreach Strategies

The Village of Northport understands that public participation is not one-size-fits-all. The level, method, and timing of outreach should be customized based on the nature of the project, the stakeholders affected, and the anticipated level of community interest. This section outlines how the Village will determine and apply appropriate engagement strategies for specific planning and development activities.

1. Master Plan Development and Updates

The master plan sets the vision for land use, infrastructure, housing, and economic development. Given its significance and long-term impact, the Village will employ broad and inclusive engagement strategies at all phases.

Engagement tools may include:

• Surveys (print and digital)
• Open houses and charrettes
• Community visioning workshops
• Walkabouts and neighborhood tours
• Focus groups for youth, seniors, and business owners

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• Notifications via website, social media, email, and newspaper
• Required stakeholder mailings per the Michigan Planning Enabling Act (PA 33 of 2008)

2. Zoning Ordinance Amendments

Because zoning governs the use and development of land, amendments may have direct neighborhood impacts. Public engagement will focus on clarity, accessibility, and targeted outreach.
Methods may include:
• Explanatory fact sheets and zoning maps
• Interactive mapping tools (if available)
• Small-group meetings with affected property owners
• Public hearings as required under the Michigan Zoning Enabling Act (PA 110 of 2006)
• Notices via mail, social media, and the Village website

3. Capital Improvement Plan (CIP)

The CIP outlines planned infrastructure investments over a 6-year period. Because it allocates significant resources, the Village will inform and solicit feedback from both the general public and specific service users.
Outreach efforts may include:
• Public presentations and Q&A at Council and Planning Commission meetings
• Comment period via email and website
• Utility bill inserts and e-blasts
• Visual project timelines and maps

4. Core Commercial Development and Redevelopment Projects

Redevelopment of publicly or privately owned sites, particularly in the downtown core, draws a wide array of public interest. These projects benefit from sustained engagement to build consensus and mitigate opposition.
Outreach strategies may include:
• Pop-up booths at downtown events (e.g., Harbor Days, Farmers Market)
• Charrettes and design workshops with stakeholders
• Pre-application meetings with developers that include public representatives
• Business-focused forums hosted with the Elk Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce
• Partnership updates from the Downtown Development Authority (PA 57 of 2018)

5. Policy Development and Strategic Plans

Village-wide policies, such as housing, transportation, sustainability, or economic development strategies, require comprehensive engagement that goes beyond minimum legal requirements.
Engagement methods may include:
• Project-specific webpages with draft policy summaries
• Surveys or polling to test resident priorities
• Facilitated stakeholder roundtable
• Listening sessions with marginalized or hard-to-reach groups
• Pilot programs or demonstration events

Notification and Accessibility

Public engagement can only be effective when community members are aware of opportunities to participate and can access information in ways that suit their needs. The Village of Northport is committed to providing clear, timely, and accessible public notices using a range of communication channels. This includes accommodations for individuals with disabilities and proactive efforts to reach underrepresented groups.

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Meeting Notices and Legal Posting Requirements

In accordance with the Michigan Open Meetings Act (PA 267 of 1976), the Village will:

- Post an annual schedule of all regular Village Council and Planning Commission meetings within 10 days of the first meeting of the year.
- Post notice of special or rescheduled meetings at least 18 hours in advance.
- Display all notices at the Village Office and on the Village website.
- Include time, date, location, and access information on all posted notices.

The Village will also provide instructions for accessing meetings via Zoom and links to livestreams or audio recordings when available.

Additional Notification Tools

To go beyond minimum legal standards, the Village may use the following tools depending on the project or meeting:

- Direct mail postcards for zoning amendments or large-scale projects
- Inserts in utility bills
- Email alerts to subscribers and stakeholders
- Announcements at public meetings
- Flyers at the Library, Post Office and Leelanau Township Office
- Notices in the Leelanau Enterprise and other local publications
- Social media posts with accessible graphics and brief summaries
- Event-specific signage at project sites or downtown locations

Accessibility for Individuals with Disabilities

The Village complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and will make reasonable accommodations for individuals who require assistance to access public meetings or materials. This includes:

- Holding meetings in accessible locations
- Providing large print materials or digital formats on request
- Offering interpretation, captioning, or assisted listening services with advance notice
- Providing curbside material pickup or drop-off for physically distanced input when needed

Residents may contact the Village Clerk to request accommodations at least 48 hours in advance of a meeting or event.

Language Access and Inclusion

The Village complies with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin in federally assisted programs. To support meaningful access:

- Public notices and project information may be translated upon request
- Surveys and outreach materials will include a brief message in Spanish (or other locally relevant languages) offering translation help
- Village staff and partners will use plain language in outreach materials to enhance readability and understanding

Reaching Underrepresented Audiences

The Village acknowledges that traditional methods may not effectively reach all segments of the population. To address this, Northport will:

- Leverage networks like homeowner associations, school email lists, and community groups

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• Engage with seasonal residents through the Harbor Master's office, vacation rental groups, and visitor guides
• Coordinate with the Housing Commission to reach residents of Noble Pines and other rental communities
• Schedule events at varying times and days to accommodate different work and caregiving schedules
• Partner with local organizations like Norte and Green Elk Rapids to promote participation in youth and environmental initiatives

Public Comment Policy and Documentation

Public comment is a vital component of government transparency and civic engagement. It allows residents, business owners, and stakeholders to express concerns, provide feedback, and contribute to decisions that affect the future of the community. The Village of Northport encourages respectful and constructive public participation across all platforms.

Public Comment at Meetings

In accordance with the Michigan Open Meetings Act (PA 267 of 1976), every open meeting of a public body shall provide time for public comment. The Village applies the following standards:
• Public comment is included on every regular meeting agenda of the Village Council, Planning Commission, and all boards and committees.
• Individuals may speak in person or via Zoom during hybrid meetings.
• Speakers are generally asked to limit their remarks to three (3) minutes to ensure that all voices can be heard.
• Commenters are encouraged to state their name and address (or general location) for the record, though it is not required.
• Meeting chairs may provide brief responses or refer matters to staff or committees for follow-up.
• The Village reserves the right to adopt meeting rules to ensure civility, prevent disruption, and stay on schedule.

Written Comments and Digital Input

In addition to verbal comment at meetings, the Village welcomes input submitted through other channels:
• Email: Written comments may be sent to the Village Clerk or relevant department prior to any meeting.
• Website: An online comment form is available at www.elkrapids.org.
• USPS: Letters can be mailed or dropped off at the Government Center, 315 Bridge Street.
• Social Media: Comments made on official Village posts will be acknowledged and may be summarized or shared with the appropriate board or commission, though social media is not an official public record.
• Surveys and Polls: Feedback gathered through digital surveys will be analyzed and reported back to the public where appropriate.

All comments received prior to a meeting will be made available to board or commission members and may be summarized in the meeting minutes or attachments.

Documentation and Recordkeeping

The Village Clerk and staff are responsible for tracking public participation and maintaining transparency in documentation. This includes:
• Recording public comment periods in the minutes of all official meetings.
• Summarizing written comments or attachments shared prior to a meeting.
• Posting draft and approved minutes on the Village website in accordance with OMA timelines.
• Retaining email correspondence, survey results, and other forms of digital input according to Michigan FOIA and record retention policies.

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• Maintaining a log of participation metrics, including number of attendees, speakers, written comments, and digital engagement rates.

Closing the Loop
To ensure transparency and accountability, the Village will make a good faith effort to summarize public input and explain how it was used. This may include:
• Written summaries in meeting packets or follow-up memos.
• Visual dashboards or charts showing survey results.
• Updates on the Village website or social media noting how decisions reflected community feedback.

The Village believes that closing the feedback loop strengthens trust and encourages sustained public participation in the future.

Communicating Results

Public participation is most effective when community members can see how their input has shaped decisions. The Village of Elk Rapids is committed to maintaining transparency and building trust by clearly communicating the results of engagement efforts. This includes sharing public comments, summarizing feedback themes, and explaining how input was considered during decision-making.

Goals of Communicating Results
• Build trust and accountability by demonstrating that community voices are heard.
• Encourage continued civic engagement by showing that input makes a difference.
• Close the feedback loop between residents, staff, and decision-makers.
• Provide clarity on decisions that may not reflect every viewpoint but were informed by a broad set of perspectives.

Methods of Sharing Results
The Village will use a combination of communication tools to report on engagement outcomes, depending on the scale of the project and the audience involved. These may include:

1. Website Updates

• Posting summary reports of engagement events or surveys on www.elkrapids.org
• Sharing charts, maps, or visuals that highlight major themes or findings
• Uploading PDFs of written public comments or meeting summaries for Council and Commission Meetings
• Including summaries of public input in staff reports and meeting packets
• Verbal updates by staff or consultants during presentations
• Responding to public comment themes during deliberations

2. Email and Social Media

• Sending wrap-up messages to subscribers or those who participated in events or surveys
• Posting highlights or infographic-style recaps on Facebook or Instagram
• Linking to full reports or meeting videos when available

3. Printed Materials and Displays

• Summarizing outcomes in the Village newsletter
• Creating posters or handouts for public meetings or pop-up booths

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• Displaying visual feedback summaries at the Village Office or Library

4. Community Events or Wrap-Up Meetings

• Holding public debriefs following major planning initiatives
• Returning to stakeholder groups that provided early input to share final outcomes
• Providing final plans with annotations or callouts showing how community input was addressed

Example Scenarios

• After a charrette or visioning workshop: A brief report with photos, key quotes, and a summary of recommendations may be shared online and at an open house.
• After a zoning update: A "What We Heard" document may summarize concerns raised during the hearing and explain how the ordinance language was revised in response.
• After a survey: A chart-based summary of results may be posted with a narrative explaining next steps or how the data will be used.

Evaluating the Effectiveness of Participation Efforts

Effective public engagement is an ongoing process of learning and refinement. The Village of Northport is committed to regularly evaluating its outreach and participation efforts to determine what worked, what needs improvement, and how strategies can evolve to better meet the needs of the community. This approach ensures transparency, accountability, and long-term success.

Why Evaluation Matters

• It helps identify which tools and messages were most effective.
• It allows the Village to reach more diverse and representative audiences over time.
• It ensures compliance with state laws and RRC best practices.
• It supports adaptive decision-making and better use of Village resources.
• It builds a feedback culture that values public insight and reflection.

Evaluation Metrics

The Village will track and review both quantitative and qualitative indicators, such as:
Participation Data

• Number of attendees at meetings, open houses, or events
• Number of public comments submitted (oral and written)
• Number of survey responses or poll participants
• Social media post engagement (likes, shares, comments, link clicks)
• Website analytics (views, downloads, time spent on project pages)
• Attendance by demographic or stakeholder category, when possible

Qualitative Feedback

• Comments received on the quality of engagement (clarity, tone, accessibility)
• Informal debriefs from staff, elected officials, and participants
• Lessons learned from consultants or facilitators
• Reflections on what groups were underrepresented and why
• Input from boards and commissions about the effectiveness of outreach

Outcomes-Based Measures

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• Whether participation led to specific plan changes or policy decisions
• Whether community members report feeling heard or satisfied with the process
• Whether participation increased over time or across different topics
• How early involvement impacted later support for projects or initiatives

Evaluation Tools

The Village may use the following to support structured evaluation:
• Sign-in sheets and comment logs
• Meeting debrief templates
• Post-event surveys (e.g., paper forms or Google Forms)
• Year-end review with Planning Commission and Council

Reporting and Review

Evaluation results will be documented and shared as part of the Village's commitment to transparency. This includes:
• Staff reports summarizing engagement efforts
• Annual review of the Public Participation Plan by Village staff
• Recommendations for improvements included in planning memos
• Periodic updates to the PPP based on evaluation findings

The PPP itself will be reviewed at least once per year and updated as needed to reflect new outreach tools, community expectations, legal requirements, and staffing capacity.

Closing Statement

The Village of Northport affirms its commitment to transparency, accountability, and inclusion in all aspects of local governance. This Public Participation Plan is not simply a procedural requirement, but a living framework to guide how the Village engages with its residents, businesses, developers, and regional partners. By proactively seeking public input, evaluating engagement efforts, and clearly communicating outcomes, the Village fosters a culture of collaboration and shared responsibility for community development.This plan reflects not only compliance with the Michigan Open Meetings Act, but also the values of trust, fairness, and accessibility. It will evolve as the Village grows and as new tools, technologies, and expectations emerge. Residents are encouraged to participate actively in shaping Northport now and into the future.

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