



---

## Public Participation Program

“Participation of the governed in their government is, in theory, the cornerstone of democracy – a revered idea that is vigorously applauded by virtually everyone.” Sherry Arnstein, *A Ladder of Citizen Participation*.

Public input is one of the most important parts in the process of developing comprehensive plans. In Marietta, the goal of staff was to insure that the Comprehensive Plan reflects the full range of community values and desires. The community input was gathered by involving a diverse spectrum of individuals and stakeholders in the process of developing the plan document. Meaningful public input in the plan development process will assist in the prospect that it will eventually be implemented because the public will have a vested interest in the future of the community. The following are the variety of stakeholders that were asked to participate and the methods of public participation that were used during the plan development process.

### Stakeholders

One of the avenues staff used to generate a diversity of opinions from the public was to establish a Steering Committee. The Steering Committee was established at the beginning of the process and contained various stakeholders to assist in the development of the plan document. The Steering Committee was comprised of a variety of individuals from throughout the community including members of public, private, and non-profit sectors all of whom were active in the community.

The point of the Steering Committee was to assist staff in identifying issues and opportunities, policies, and implementation items that would meet the needs of the different constituencies in the community. The Steering Committee also acted as liaisons to the community and various interest groups by keeping them informed about the process and distributing information about the contents of the plan document.

The Steering Committee was successful in allowing staff to gain further insight into the opinions of the various interest groups and neighborhoods throughout the city. The committee also provided us with valuable information that we used to supplement other forms of input gained from the public meetings. The Steering Committee contained representatives of the following groups:

- Business Interests
- City Staff
- Elected Officials
- Environmental Advocacy



- 
- Historic Preservation Foundation
  - Homebuilders/Developers
  - Homeowners
  - IMPACT (Involved Mariettans Planning Actively for the City of Tomorrow)
  - Latino Association
  - Marietta Housing Authority
  - Marietta School Systems
  - Marietta Tree Keepers
  - NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People)
  - Planning Commissioners
  - Residents
  - SPSU (Southern Polytechnic State University)



---

## **Public Involvement**

Public input into the planning process was generated using three main techniques: surveys, questionnaires and public workshops. Surveys were used at two points in the process as mechanisms to determine community preference. The first survey was in regards to the specific language of the vision statement. The second survey was used to understand the public's perception of issues and opportunities. Questionnaires were used at public meetings to gain a further understanding about the variety of issues identified by the community. The topics covered by the questionnaires were policies to be undertaken by the community and implementation items for the upcoming decade. Finally, a total of ten (10) public workshops and three (3) public meetings were conducted to assist in obtaining public attitudes and opinions, as well as a means to distribute information about the process concerning different aspects of the plan document.

The surveys were designed to identify the community's concerns regarding various aspects of the plan document. The Planning and Zoning Division received about 3,000 surveys and written responses that were then analyzed to understand the participants' preferences. The analysis was used to scrutinize the presented materials and make the appropriate revisions. The surveys gave us a good idea about the participant's preference on many issues; however, due to the insufficient sample size, we could not make a direct statistical correlation that the participant's comments represented the community-at-large.

Questionnaires were used at each of the public workshops to supplement verbal comments. These questionnaires provided us with in depth information about the participant's opinions regarding the policies and implementation items. We received about twenty (20) written questionnaires from each of the public meetings. Overall, the public's comments were positive; however, some well thought out constructive criticism was gathered that helped shape the final plan document.

Public workshops were the most commonly used public participation technique throughout the process. A total of ten forums were scheduled during the plan development process. The forums were conducted in a manner to ensure interaction between the community and staff. Poster boards displaying various pieces of information were used to educate the public about the process and assist in soliciting input from the participants. Staff gained input from the community through verbal discussions and questionnaires. The average attendance for the public workshops was approximately forty (40) individuals.

The public workshops started during the visioning process. The Marietta City Council had attended a retreat in August 2002 and drafted a vision statement. City staff then conducted a series of eight (8) public forums in various neighborhoods in the city to solicit public input and comments on the draft vision statement. Staff analyzed the



---

comments and presented a revised draft vision statement to City Council, which was subsequently approved in June 2003.

Public workshops were also used during the development of the policies and implementation items for the comprehensive plan. Drafts of these policies were generated by the Steering Committee. The draft items were then presented to the community during two (2) public workshops. During the workshops, comments were gathered from the community via verbal and written responses. These comments were then used to revise the draft statements, which were presented to City Council as discussion items during regularly scheduled meetings.

Finally, three (3) public meetings were conducted during the comprehensive planning process. A kick-off meeting took place, which provided information to the community about the planning process and helped the community understand how they can participate in the process. A second public meeting was held when the draft vision statement was approved by City Council. A third public meeting was held to approve the Comprehensive Plan document so it could be sent to the Atlanta Regional Commission and Georgia Department of Community Affairs for review.