Community Engagement Strategies

To support Council discussion on community engagement, the following provides examples of engagement between the community and Council. These efforts aim to advance the Council Priorities Objectives by fostering community awareness, boosting civic participation, and gathering stakeholder input.

General approaches include town halls, community information sessions, office hours, neighborhood meetings, online surveys, polls, and digital engagement platforms. These efforts fall into three areas of focus:
- topic-based community engagement to help inform Council decision-making
- general engagement such as listening sessions/opportunities that are open-ended
- following-up/closing the loop on issues raised by community members

The City employs a diverse array of engagement strategies and methodologies, customizing them based on the audience, desired input, and timeframe to effectively gather feedback for informed decision-making. The City uses the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) as a framework to organize community involvement, ensuring alignment with the specific input or feedback required for each project or issue:

- **Inform:** Fact sheets, webpages, blog posts, information sessions, open houses, frequently asked questions, website feedback forms, information campaigns
- **Consult & Involve:** Surveys, focus groups, questions and answer sessions, office hours, public meetings like community meetings, town halls, panel discussions, workshops, polling, community meetings
- **Collaborate & Empower:** Working groups, ad hoc groups, feedback groups, boards, commissions and committee meetings, community advisory panels, advisory groups, digital engagement platforms, and voter ballot measures.

Recent engagement tools discussed by the Council are summarized here for further input and discussion:
- *Use of Citizen advisory committees* – Council referred to the Policy & Services Committee interest in establishing a committee to advise on councilmember compensation and discussing next steps.
- *Establishment of new boards or commissions* – While not explicitly directed by Council at this point, the City's Economic Development Strategy calls for the City to convene new or reinvigorated business organizations in Downtown, California Avenue, and Midtown business districts. Staff is currently working with the Chamber of Commerce and business stakeholders to establish regular meetings in a format that will foster sustained engagement which tie to specific proposed objectives contained in this report.
- *Consideration of Ballot measures* – If the Council is interested in advancing issues for voter consideration, proposals must be largely finalized by June.

At this year's Council retreat, the Council discussed utilizing and formalizing Council Ad Hoc committees to advance engagement on specific topic areas such as:

- Housing
- Retail
- Sustainability/Climate Action Plan
- Cubberley
- Stanford

In addition, Council committees and existing boards, commissions and committees are actively used to facilitate community conversations on various topics throughout the year.
The City also looks to neighborhood, educational, and community organizations such as Palo Alto Neighborhoods (PAN), Stanford University, Emergency Service Volunteers, churches, parent and youth groups, and many more to engage and inform. These existing groups share engagement opportunities with their community networks, acting as ambassadors for increased public dialogue and engagement.

The City's website remains a reliable hub, frequented by the community, with over 900,000 users last year. Visitors accessed event details, service information, and engaged through online forms, FAQs, white papers, fact sheets, general surveys, and the new City Service Feedback tool available at www.cityofpaloalto.org. OpenForms, our website survey/poll resource, gains input on various topics on an annual basis. The Community Engagement web page at www.cityofpaloalto.org/engage is a direct connection to the City's Open Town Hall as well. The City Service Feedback tool has received 140 responses from community members providing service level input. Palo Alto 311 while largely a reporting tool, alerts staff to issues with the opportunity for direct engagement with the community who reported the concern. In 2023, there were over 5,500 community requests submitted.