

Harris County Unified Development Code Update

Public Involvement Plan

Overview

The update to the zoning and development codes to create a Unified Development Code (UDC) is an important process for the Harris County community, and public involvement is a critical component. This Public Involvement Plan (PIP) describes the outreach, engagement and education activities that will be implemented throughout the process. The PIP contains tailored strategies and communication objectives to be conducted during the progression of the update. This is a “living” document that will be evaluated periodically and adjusted as necessary to maintain its effectiveness as the project progresses.

To promote awareness and maximize involvement, it is imperative to provide a variety of outreach opportunities that will reach as much of the county population as possible. The goal of this update is to develop a clear, user-friendly Unified Development Ordinance that is consistent with other County planning documents and policies. The objectives for the update include:

- Provide a more predictable set of land use regulations for the community, developers, and County officials; minimize vague language about requirements;
- Update the format and structure to be more user-friendly and intuitive, consolidating codes into chapters that are organized to mirror the land development process, and including the use of illustrations or other graphics to convey design standards;
- Improve the efficiency of the land development process by streamlining administrative review, approval, and permitting for routine matters;
- Integrate with and cross-reference other land use-related ordinances and documents;
- Ensure consistency with local, state, and federal laws and regulations; and
- Eliminate outdated, unclear, or contradictory language that could cause need for frequent and extensive interpretations.

Public Engagement Activities and COVID-19

Due to guidelines and recommendations set forth by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for navigating risks associated with COVID-19 and large public gatherings, as well as information from the Georgia Department of Public Health and Governor’s office, the approach to public meetings is being altered from the original approach in order to accommodate social distancing.

At this time, it is yet to be determined the extent to which it will be appropriate to host upcoming public workshops in-person. Due to this uncertainty, we are developing an online alternative for public meetings that will mirror the presentation materials and information provided in a traditional meeting format. The option to access an online alternative will be available even if in-person meetings are possible.

Guidance for Attending Community Gatherings (if and when permitted)

The latest guidance for community gatherings will be adhered to for any scheduled in-person public workshops or meetings facilitated by Wood. CDC recommendations will be implemented to the greatest extent feasible including best practices to provide a safe, healthy environment.

In addition, Wood will design the meeting format to limit the number of people in the meeting place at one time. This may be done through scheduling meeting slots for individual districts or group of districts to limit the number of attendees. Another alternative would be to provide an “open house” format in which there is not set meeting time, but instead a specified time frame (e.g., 9:00am – 7:00pm) during which attendees can drop into the meeting that their convenience. An open house format also allows for more one-on-one

discussion and interaction with Wood staff. If and when community gatherings are allowed, there will be encouragement for attendees who are at higher risk of development serious illness from COVID-19, including older adults and people with known underlying health problems, to participate to utilize the digital engagement option, in accordance with CDC Guidelines on community gatherings and the Governor’s most recent Executive Order. In addition, we ask that those who may be sick to participate using the virtual meeting alternative. A location for in-person meetings will be selected based on the size and capacity of a facility to accommodate social distancing.

Approach to Virtual Public Workshops

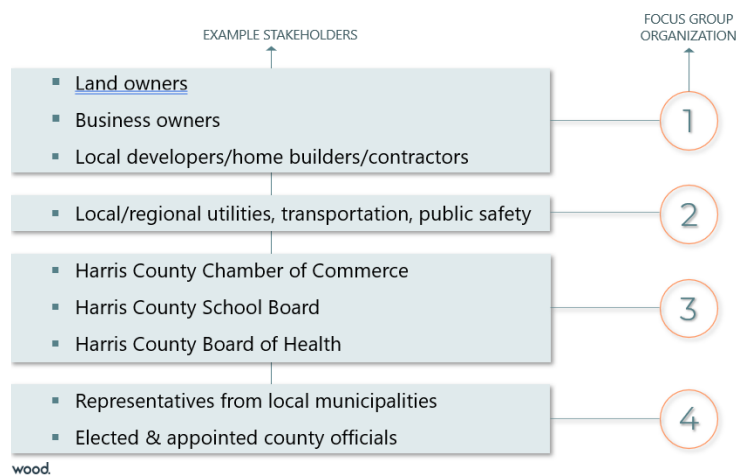
The American Planning Association has reported that, in many ways, a digital engagement approach can reach a broader, more inclusive net of participants than traditional in-person meetings. This has proven true time and time again as planners and local leaders have had to shift to facilitate public meetings amidst mandatory quarantine orders. While digital community engagement can be extremely successful, it is recognized that not everyone has equal access to broadband access or even a computer or a phone that with internet capabilities.



Public Involvement Opportunities

Focus Groups

Focus groups will be organized to foster small group discussions. Focus groups, which include similar ‘types’ of stakeholders, enable exchange of information and ideas and are effective in obtaining detailed input from those with topic familiarity in a quick and efficient manner. Discussions will focus on emerging zoning issues, specific zoning/development concerns, and desired outcomes. Wood will coordinate with the Steering Committee and County Commissioners to identify four (4) suitable groups to be interviewed. Each designated Focus Group is expected to have one meeting. Focus group meetings will take place as needed during the process.



Focus groups are expected to include representatives from the following types of local stakeholders:

- Landowners
- Business owners
- Local developers/home builders/contractors
- Local/regional utilities, transportation, public safety
- Harris County Chamber of Commerce
- Harris County School Board
- Harris County Board of Health
- Representatives from local municipalities
- Elected & appointed county officials

Public Meetings

A series of county-wide public meetings and workshops will be conducted during this process. A target project schedule is provided at the end of this document, which provides a brief description of the various meeting types that will take place during this public engagement process.

In choosing locations for public meetings and workshops, the planning is considering larger spaces that will provide ample space for safe distancing. As many locations across the county that were originally being

considered to host public workshops are smaller in size and/or potentially unavailable (schools, etc.), the Harris County Community Center has been selected to host community meetings (Public Workshops, Open House) that do not take place in the Harris County Courthouse, Room 223 (where the Board of Commissioners holds regular meetings).

- *Kick-Off Meeting* – A Kick-Off Meeting, will be conducted during a regularly scheduled Board of Commissioners meeting to formally introduce the project, public involvement process, project goals, targeted schedule, and receive initial input from board members. The Kick-Off Meeting took place at the regularly scheduled Board of Commissioners meeting on March 3, 2020.
- *Community Workshops* – Public workshops are very beneficial for defining issues and building community awareness around specific zoning considerations. Two public workshops will be held in the process. Each will be visually interactive and focus on the top issues identified from early input. These meetings are designed to solicit meaningful public input from different communities in Harris County. Wood will coordinate with County leaders on meeting dates, convenient locations and advance promotion. In accordance with CDC guidelines and available large community spaces, all community workshops will take place at the Harris County Community Center located at 7509 SR 116, Hamilton, GA 31811. In addition, a virtual meeting platform will be established as an alternative to attending a meeting in person. Broad notification of the workshops will include the County's communication methods, elected officials contacts, local news media and distribution of workshop flyers in public places.
- *"Big Idea" Meeting* – This is a combined, facilitated meeting with the County Commissioners, Planning Commission members, and the Steering Committee to review and discuss significant new concepts or approaches that Wood and the Steering Committee have discussed and propose for inclusion in the Unified Development Code. This meeting will provide guidance and clarity to confirm how major issues should be addressed in the UDC draft and will take place prior to completion of a first draft. This meeting will be scheduled as an advertised public meeting (not as part of a regularly scheduled BOC meeting).

After completion of an initial draft of the Unified Development Code update, the draft review and approval process will include the following steps:

- *Draft Review Meeting* – At the time of draft ordinance completion, Wood will facilitate a meeting with the Planning Commission and County Commissioners to share highlights of the text and gauge the level of public understanding and acceptance. This may take place as a joint meeting with both the Planning Commission and County Commissioners or as two separate meetings.
- *Open House* – This meeting provides an opportunity for the community to review a final version of the draft document in an open house setting that allows more time for review and the opportunity to have one-on-one discussions with County staff and Wood. This meeting will take place during a specified time and will allow participants to attend at their convenience in a "drop-in" format.
- *Adoption Hearings* – The final UDC will be presented during two (2) required public hearings at regularly scheduled Board of Commissioners meetings. The purpose of these meetings is for official adoption in accordance with the Georgia Zoning Procedures Law.

Communication Tools

A variety of communication tools will be used as part of the public outreach process to maximize community engagement and participation in this project. These tools include a project web page on the Harris County website, a community survey, and a dedicated project e-mail that will be used to collect input and also inform the community about public meetings and project schedule. When applicable, flyers advertising upcoming meetings and workshops will be posted in public buildings in the County to promote meetings and provide information about the project.

- *Project Webpage* – A project webpage has been established on the County’s website for the Unified Development Code update and will serve as the official communication tool and participation mechanism for the duration of the project. The webpage will include project news and updates, a link to the online survey, a synopsis of Steering Committee meetings, participation information and opportunities, and project documents. The web page will be updated periodically throughout the project with relevant information.

Link to access the project webpage: <http://harriscountyga.gov/update-of-the-countys-land-use-and-development-codes-official-project-page/>

- *Community Survey* – An online survey is an effective means of obtaining detailed feedback from individuals. Early in the process, a survey will be created, posted to the project webpage and circulated and promoted with assistance from the Steering Committee and County Commissioners. The survey will be available online and will be distributed broadly through the tools identified above. Hard copies of the survey will also be available in the Community Development Department and County Administration Building. The survey will be available from 3/5/2020 – September 2020, or as long as necessary.

Link to access the online survey: https://woodplc.surveymonkey.com/r/HCga_UDCupdate

- *Dedicated Project Email* – zoningcode@harriscountyga.gov This project email can be contacted to receive comments and answer questions.
- *Virtual Meeting Platform* – As stated previously, in addition to traditional in-person meetings, a virtual component to community engagement will be provided which will include an interactive webpage that contains all meeting materials relevant to the public workshops.

Contacts Database

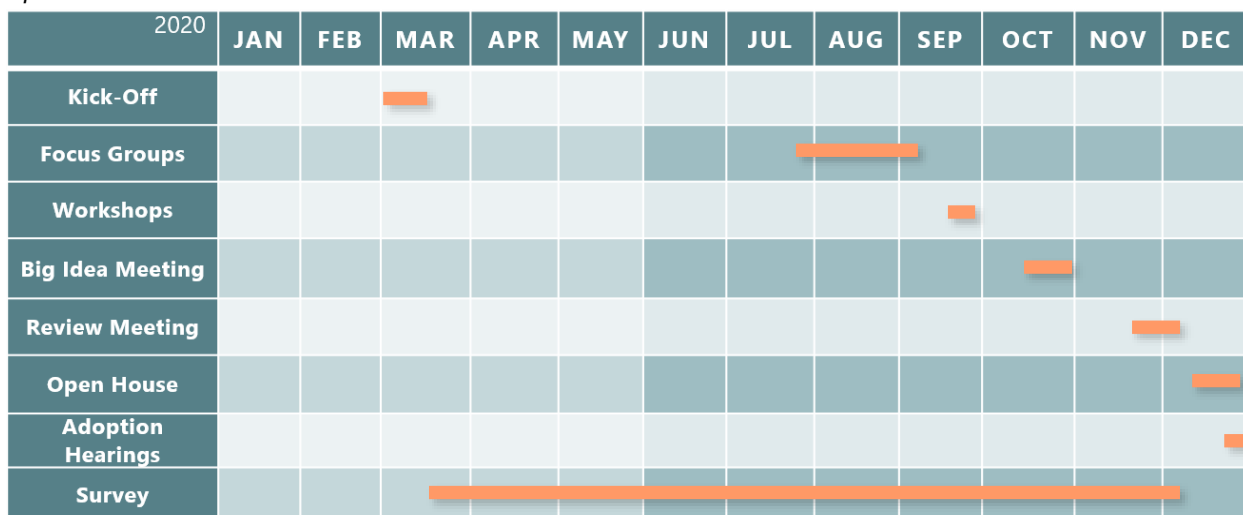
As the process progresses, a database of contacts will be developed and maintained to assist with communications. The list will be updated during the course of the project, with contact information collected through sign-in sheets from public meetings, emails, and other correspondence. Individuals who are on the list will receive direct email notifications in advance of public meetings.

Public Involvement Schedule

The schedule below depicts the **target** public involvement schedule. The orange bars represent a time period during which the meetings are expected to take place and will be refined as the project moves forward. As the project evolves, the schedule may need to be adjusted to accommodate project needs. An updated version of the project schedule will be maintained on the project webpage on the County’s website and will be updated as needed throughout this process.

Updated TARGET Public Involvement Schedule*

9/24/2020



*Schedule reflects “target” timeframe for meeting dates to occur that are subject to change.