Enhancing Community Engagement and Outreach in Fairfax County

ULI Washington
Regional Fellows Program
Fairfax County Technical Assistance Panel
April 27, 2017

ULI Washington

Over 2,200 Members, who include developers, architects, planners, public officials, financiers, students. **Our programming emphasizes sharing best practices and providing outreach to communities.**

Regional Fellows Program

The mission of the ULI Washington Regional Fellows Program is to **empower public sector leaders** in the Metropolitan Washington Region to build, and sustain successful 21st Century communities by providing access to information, best practices, peer networks, and other resources to foster creative, efficient, and sustainable land use practices.

2017 Regional Fellows Program

TAP Panelists

Panel Co-Chairs and Faculty

- **A.J. Jackson**, EYA
- **Julia Koster**, National Capital Planning Commission

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- **Jewru Bandeh**, Regional Director, Montgomery County Eastern Region
- **Yon Lambert**, Dept. of Transportation and Environmental Services, City of Alexandria
- **Karl Moritz**, Planning Director, City of Alexandria

TAP Panelists

Panelists

- **Agnès Artemel**, Artemel & Associates, Inc.
- **Samia Byrd**, Arlington County Dept. of Community Planning, Housing & Development
- **Bob Harris**, Lerch, Early & Brewer
- **Drew Morrison**, VHB
- **Mark Silverwood**, Silverwood Associates
- **John Swanson**, Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments

Fairfax County Fellows

- **Sharon Bulova**, Chair, Board of Supervisors
- **Barbara Byron**, Office of Community Revitalization
- **Kirk Kincannon**, Fairfax County Park Authority
- **Fred Selden**, Dept. of Planning and Zoning
- **Lauren Murphy**, Office of Community Revitalization

Today's Assignment: Fairfax County

- Broaden outreach and engagement, particularly to those who don't currently participate
- Increase public understanding of process
- Promote creative engagement
- Better utilize technology
- Identify implications for resources and culture

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Overview

Trust

- Good news:
  - Fairfax County government appears to have high credibility as a source of information on land use matters
- Challenges:
  - Inclusivity: The current system is not as representative – as the County grows there are greater opportunities for trust to erode
  - Transparency: if you aren't engaged already, it's not transparent to newcomers
- You can maintain and improve the current trust levels through short term and long term actions

Process

- Current model is understood and working well for informed participants
- Long-term risk of current process:
  - Growing demographic groups aren't well represented
  - Current process lacks transparency and consistency--problem for those not familiar with process
  - Heavy reliance on HOAs and Civic Associations to inform the public
- The good news is that you have the time to consider how you may wish to revamp the process to increase transparency and inclusiveness and maintain public trust

Culture of Consensus

- Focus on consensus among a limited group may not meet broader public interests
- Consensus vs. Collaboration
  - Consider collaboration as a goal. Why? process vs. speed -in completing work.
  - Goal is equity not equality
  - Collaborative process: access to process, making sure that input is considered and a clear feedback loop is provided
- Transitioning to a new system increases diversity of input, it doesn't take anything away from anyone

Standardize, Clarify and Define Success

- Set a county-wide land use baseline of what information people can expect to receive and how they can interact with the process
  - Multiple processes are OK if there is clarity about:
    - what the process is
    - how public input is given and used,
    - who makes the decisions
- Clarify what public engagement ‘success’ means for elected officials, staff, and stakeholders

Willingness to Try

- Legacy tools and processes are comfortable for insiders, but not for others
- People's expectations are changing. You're competing for attention
- New tech and approaches coming on line every day
- Critical: Willingness to try new tools and methods.
- Aim: Accessible, visually engaging and clear
- Be innovative, flexible and use failures to improve
- Goal: Match your regional peers

Outreach and Engagement

Outreach and Engagement Principles

- One size doesn't fit all
- Broaden participation beyond traditional participants
- Community engagement is a noun and a verb—ongoing effort
- Two-way communication
- Measuring success is necessary
- Buy–in needed at all levels of government

Expanded Outreach and Inclusiveness

Expanded Outreach and Inclusiveness

- Demographic changes in the County – owner – renter split, immigrants, millennials, aging population
- Outreach needs to be more responsive to changes in County population change

Demographics (from briefing materials)

- 32% of Fairfax population foreign-born
- 63,546 foreign-born individuals became residents since 2010
- 40% speak a language other than English at home, and 15% speak English “other than very well”

Barriers to Participation: Immigrants

- Cultural, communication (language barriers)
- Literacy/knowledge of English
- Differing authorities and decision-making structures
- Immigrants' possible distrust of government deters participation
- Lack of understanding of government structure
- Government's lack of cultural competency

Strategies to Engage Immigrant Communities

- Find community-based organizations – not always obvious
  - Need to know the cultural practices (e.g. churches, markets, restaurants) of specific groups to be able to reach and communicate
- First level of trust such as a pastor or imam needs to be found to gain a foothold with a group

Strategies to Engage Immigrant Communities

- Creativity in use of techniques to reach different groups, including lots of footwork to reach particular cultures
- Use informal networks, faith-based networks

Strategies to Engage Immigrant Communities

- Build an inventory and database of resources for various groups
- Allow community-based organizations or residents to lead community engagement efforts—recruit a business owner to lead discussion, communicate with members
- Communications should be in most-spoken languages in addition to English

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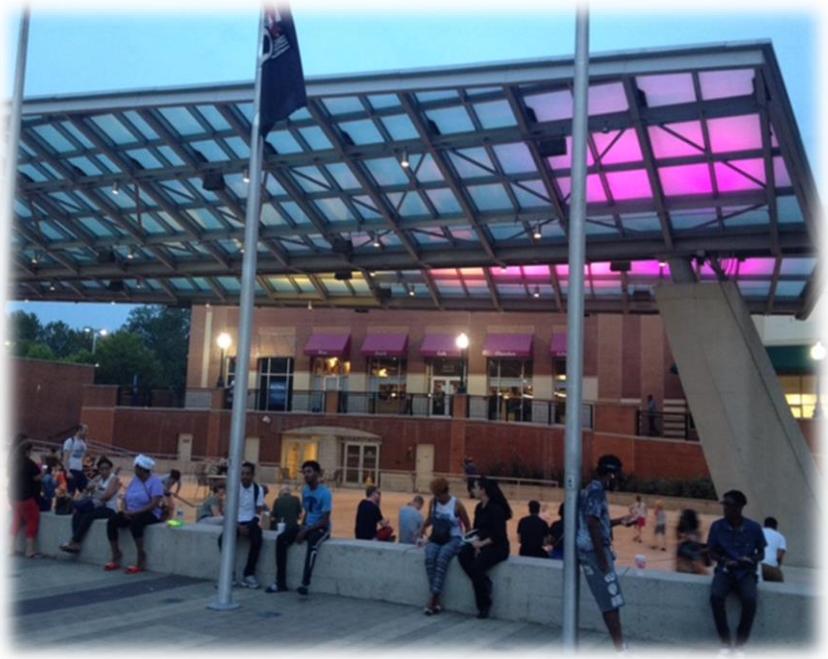
Barriers to Participation: Millennials

- Millennials don't go to meetings
- Some are pressured with new jobs, student loans, other financial issues
- More interested in lifestyle
- Driven by value of time

Strategies for Engaging Millennials

- Go where they are
- Technology is key to reaching millennials, but also social aspects
- Reframe issues in ways they care about (i.e. retail they will use)



Barriers Participation: Renters

- Renters:
  - Traditional: rent until can afford to buy
  - Now: lifestyle renters who prefer a building heavy on amenities and location to homeownership
- Civic associations aren't typically open to renters
- Immigrant renters are even further isolated from the community structure for engagement

Strategies to Engage Renters

- In newer buildings, work through property managers
- In older or low-income settings, work through social service agencies, Housing office, Police, housing inspectors, cultural and social networks, ethnic based non-profits

Barriers to Engage Businesses

- Business owners don't have time to come to meetings—they are busy running a business
- Typically don't take the time to review agendas, dockets, and public notices to see if something might affect them

Strategies to Engage Businesses

- Government usually goes to Chamber-type organizations. Need to go to small area-based or ethnic-based business groups, business partnerships.
  - Asian community works together through informal networks to supply, staff businesses
  - Economic development groups
  - Planning area groups (Tysons Partnership, SFDC)

Strategies to Engage Businesses

- Need an issue of concern: signs, loading docks, hours of operation, outdoor seating
- Partner with business group events to share information on government activity
- Allow comments via electronic means rather than requiring attendance at physical meetings

Resource Needs

- Strategies dependent on footwork, compiling databases
- High cost at the beginning; must then be maintained
- Staff training in cultural differences and approaches

Short-term Priorities

- Focus on revitalization areas for immigrant outreach rather than Countywide
- Provide staff training on cultural differences
- Start cataloguing business organizations – local Chambers; Rotary, Kiwanis, and service organizations; geography-based business groups; professional associations; ethnic group business organizations
- Have information booths at fairs, festivals

Short-term Priorities

- Identify property managers of MF buildings built within last 6-8 years
- Track demographic changes in order to adjust outreach strategies
- Build partnerships between County departments centered in engagement/outreach and immigrant issues
- Figure out how to maintain new relationships and keep them ongoing

County-wide Initiatives

Strategic Toolbox Principles

- Predictability
- Clear stages: buy-in before getting to next step
  - Outreach: establish understanding and trust
  - Strategic information gathering
  - Identify options
  - Select preferred alternative or recommendation
  - Hearings/decision
- Engage people on their terms
- Have both outreach and engagement strategies

Strategic Toolbox

- Informing public about the project
  - Vision/goals, context
  - How does this impact individuals and businesses?
  - How long will it take?
  - What info do we need?
  - What will the info be used for?
  - There will be a feedback loop
  - What is the product?

Strategic Information Gathering

- What info is used to set the agenda – what's on the table?
- Input from the public: businesses, developers, property owners, residents
- Define the issue from their perspective
- Start narrow, go broad
  1. Staff ideas
  2. Focus groups
  3. Broader engagement

Strategic Information Gathering

- ZMOD exercise: don't talk about zoning, talk about desired land uses for neighborhoods, business activity centers, etc.
- Translating zoning into what people experience: what kind of impacts does a land use have: visual, noise, traffic, what uses should be allowed in a shopping center?
- What are examples of when people/businesses run up against the ordinance? Adding a deck, looking for space to lease for a business

Options Stage

- Broader engagement, technology tools
- Model like a visual preference survey, for example
- Put input into a common format: all input has the same status
- Explain how input was translated into options
- If there are not “options” for a category, explain

Options Stage

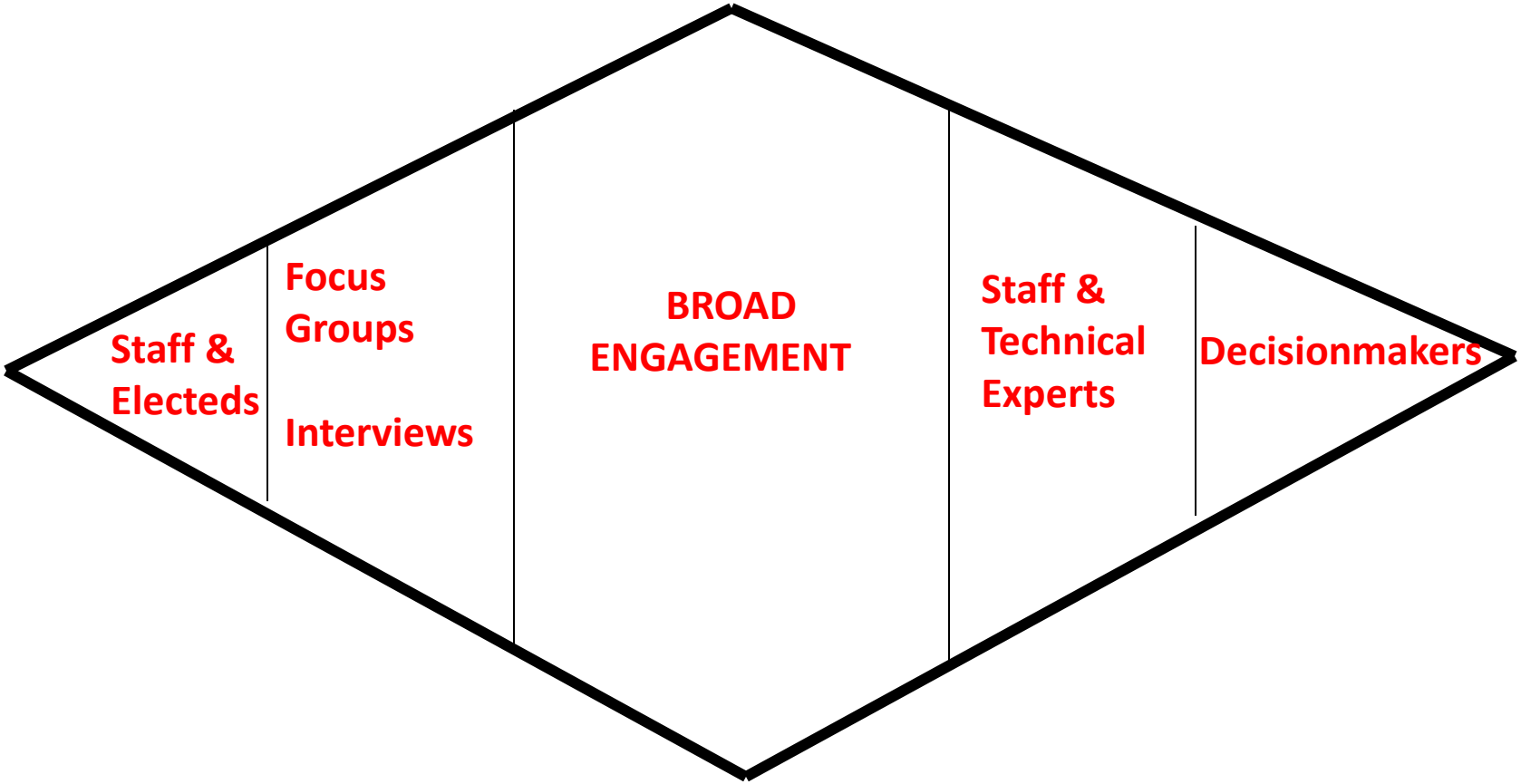
- Describe, get buy-in on how options will be evaluated
  - Consistency with County goals, plans and policies
  - Consistency with input
  - Broad agreement
  - Minimize unintended consequences

Austin, Texas

Austin, Texas

Arlington County, Virginia

Engagement Process Concept



Recommendations Stage

- How is the recommendation selected?
- This is the stage where actual text is drafted
- Goal for this phase: make sure proposed text is the best way to achieve the recommended approach
- Stakeholder committee? Planning commission subcommittee

Measures of Success

- Identified stakeholders were engaged
- Evidence that the variety of perspectives (the range of constituencies) were captured, taken into account, responded to
- Agreement that the process was fair

Project-specific Initiatives

Planning and Development Review

- Assessment:
  - Process varies widely by Magisterial District – may not be transparent to those not already in the loop Engagement is high among the people who participate
  - High-value on consensus among participants
  - Outreach is targeted at ‘insiders’- HOAs and Civic Associations
    - High dependence on Civic Associations and HOAs to inform citizens
    - Outreach misses renters (33%) and international families (40%), under 35 (45%)

Minimum Standards across all Magisterial Districts

- Require pre-filing outreach meeting with minutes submitted with application
- All land-use committee agendas be posted by county online in advance in common place.
- Consistency of online information provided by committees.
- Partner with other county agencies (e.g. schools, parks) to collect electronic contact information from residents and allow people to opt-in to notifications based on their location.
- Require county to proactively solicit contact info from HOAs and Civic Associations annually.
  - Create an opt-in list for notices that allows users to select their areas of interest (Montgomery County).

Minimum Standards across all Magisterial Districts

- Require a plain language summary of existing allowable uses, density, height, etc. and post online.
- Include all public comments as appendix to staff report.
- Create project page for each application accepted—with project summary, justification statement, and links to detailed application
- Enable electronic filing
- Plain-language flyers in local gathering spots (e.g. grocery, restaurants) for land use committee meetings.

Recommendations

1. Targeted outreach through existing social networks (e.g. churches, social clubs, schools, non-profits)
    - Inform everyone of pending applications and solicit feedback.
2. Designate ombudsman/POC for all public questions—a guide to help navigate the process. (role for technology)
3. Provide simple overview of development review process and how to engage (by District)

City of Alexandria, Virginia

CITY OF ALEXANDRIA
DEVELOPMENT REVIEW PROCESS

THE CITY'S ROLE IN MANAGING CHANGE IN ALEXANDRIA

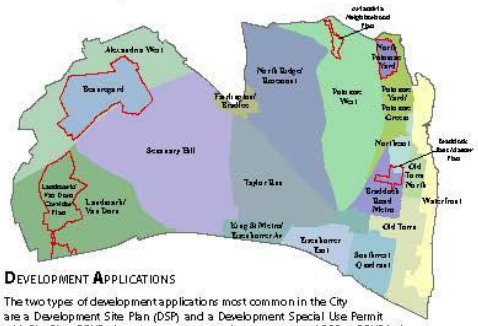
All major development projects in the City of Alexandria go through a rigorous review process. This process incorporates a high degree of public outreach, with active participation from residents and civic groups.

Our city is a diverse and attractive place to live and work, and the City Planning and Zoning Department works to retain and enhance Alexandria's quality of life by ensuring that development proposals:

- are consistent with the Master Plan and Zoning Ordinance,
- consist of the highest quality building design, urban design and site planning, and
- provide an overall public benefit.

SMALL AREA PLANS

The foundation of any development proposal is the guidance provided in the Small Area Plan for the property being considered for development. Small Area Plans lay out the vision, goals, and policies for each area of the City, including how land should be used and how neighborhoods, parks and buildings should be designed. These plans—along with the City Charter, the Strategic Plan, the Zoning Ordinance, and Design Guidelines—are the governing documents that guide the vision of the community.



DEVELOPMENT APPLICATIONS

The two types of development applications most common in the City are a Development Site Plan (DSP) and a Development Special Use Permit with Site Plan (DSUP). A property owner must have an approved DSP or DSUP before building permits can be released.

A Development Site Plan (DSP) is required in all zones for any development that:

- contains three or more dwelling units;
- is a building or addition that is 3,000 sf or larger;
- provides a parking lot with five or more parking spaces;
- is a building addition that is 1/3 or more of the existing gross square feet of the building;
- falls under other criteria listed in Section 11-400 of the Zoning Ordinance.

DSPs contain specific information about building location and elevations, landscaping, lighting, open space and other site amenities. Planning Commission holds a public hearing and takes final action. DSPs do not require review by the City Council.

A Development Special Use Permit with Site Plan (DSUP) is required in all zones for any development that requires a site plan and is requesting approval of a special use permit for the following:

- a modification of the parking ratios;
- a modification to the yard, landscape or open space requirements;
- increased building height;
- increased Floor Area Ratio;
- affordable housing bonus density;
- other special requirements listed in the applicable zone in the Zoning Ordinance.

DSUPs contain similar information to a DSP, but in greater detail, and there is more discretion with standards for review. The Planning Commission hears requests for DSUPs at a public hearing and forwards a recommendation to the City Council. The City Council holds a public hearing and takes final action.

A planner in the Development Division of the Planning and Zoning Department is assigned to each development proposal as the project manager and coordinates the review among other City departments. The planner is the main contact for questions or concerns.

CONTACTING THE DEPARTMENT

- For information about proposed development projects, visit www.alexandriava.gov/Development
- For questions about which development planner is handling your case of interest, call the Department at 703.746.4666.
- For general questions about zoning, call the Front Counter at 703.746.3588 or 703.746.3589.
- To become involved in the planning process for Small Area Plans, contact the Neighborhood Planning Division at 703.746.3809.

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Technology and Engagement

Technology and Engagement

Principles

- High Tech and High Touch
- Simple, Digestible, Actionable and Graphic
- Feedback, Accountability and Trust

Approaches

- Digital Marketing
- Electronic and Low Tech Tools
- Metrics and Performance

What We Heard

- County is transparent and provides information for those who understand system
- Social media and video deployment is increasing
- Capacity challenges to increase engagement
- Digital approaches are not the only way to broaden tent

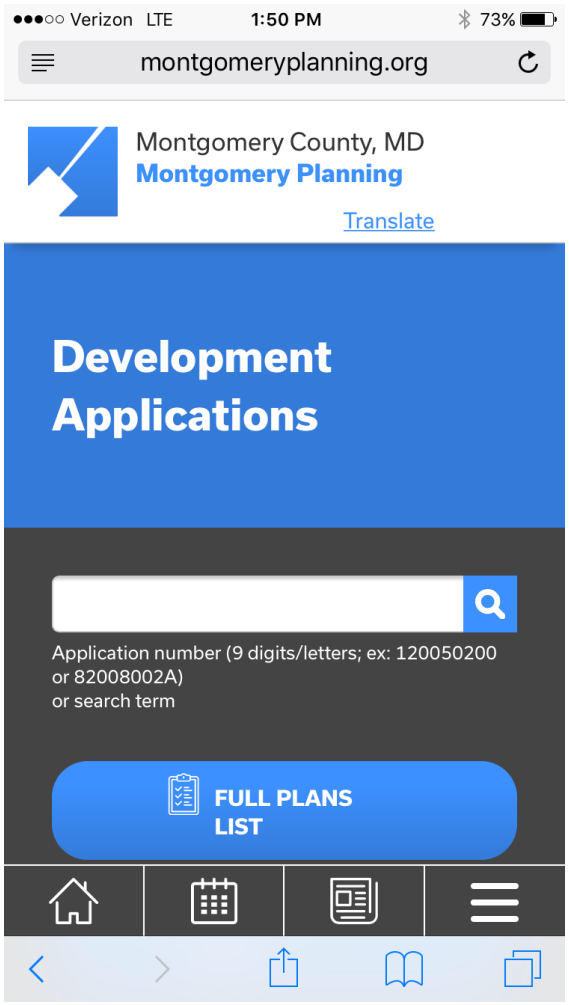
High Tech and High Touch

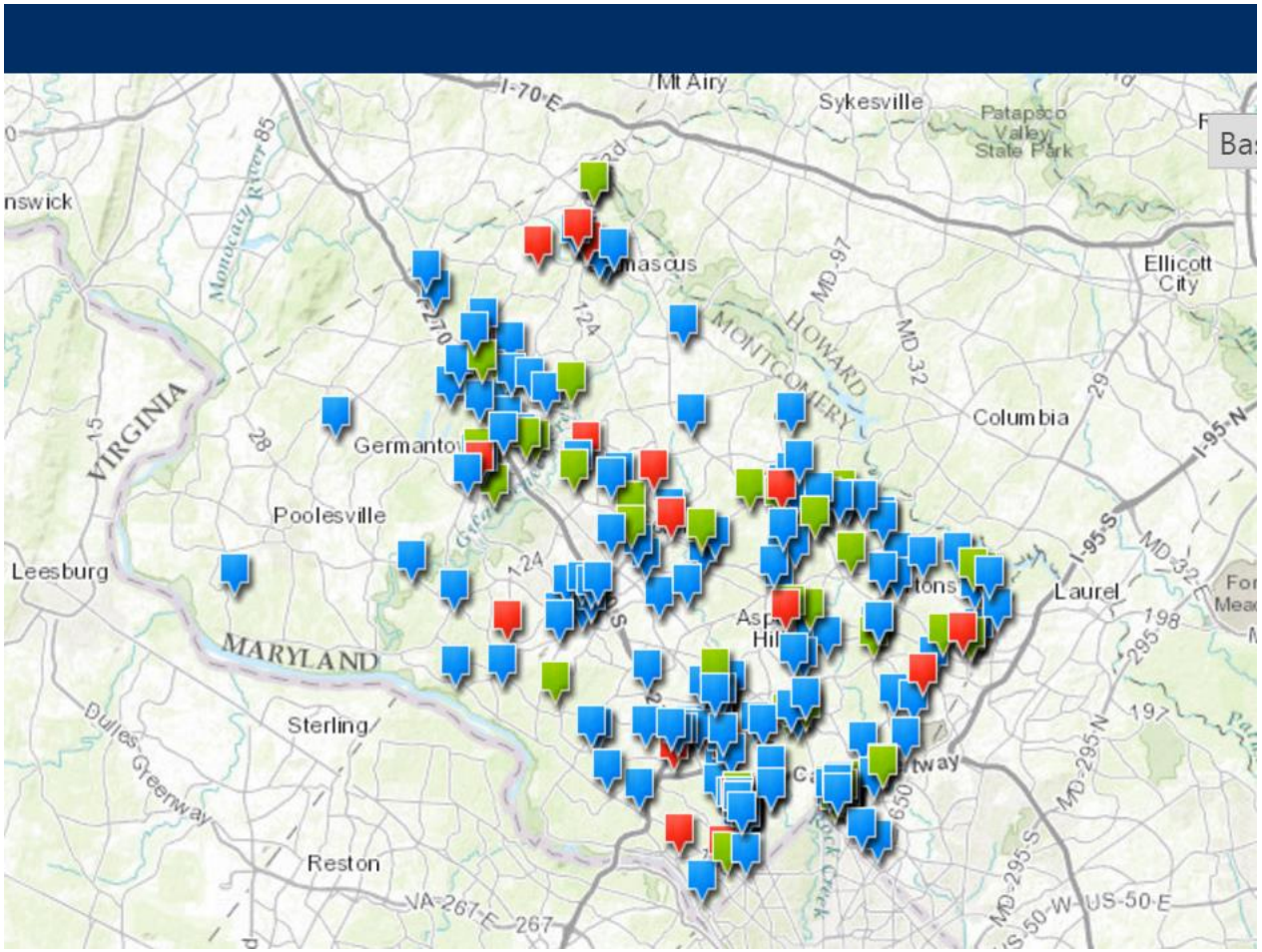
- **Augment** the County's existing engagement processes with technology
- **Fix** existing technology platforms **first**
- County can make it easier, but **manage expectations** by reminding residents to opt-in

Simple, Digestible, Actionable and Graphic

- Foundation for engagement
- Addressing the “fire hose” of information
  - Make it easy to get to information fast (i.e. on the right eNews or mailing list)
- Easy to access information:
  - Development tracker
  - FAQs
  - Process information

Simple, Digestible, Actionable and Graphic





Feedback, Accountability and Trust

- When citizens participate, their input always needs to be reflected
- Focus on “macro-level” projects for public feedback focus
- Ongoing dilemma of digital comments vs. public hearing testimony

Digital Marketing

- Digital marketing approach to “selling” participation
  - Answers: **why should I participate?**
  - Overcomes the **enthusiasm gap**
  - **Proactively** drives citizens to the website
  - Reduces **barrier** to entry

Tools

- **Drive to Website**
- **Get More Informed from Website**
- **Participate and Receive Feedback**

Tools

- **Drive to Website**
  - Marketing and Outreach
    - Digital Ads and Geofencing
    - “Screen-sharing”
    - Cross Marketing (high and low tech platforms)
    - Monthly Emails

Tools

- **Get More Information out of Website**
  - Take advantage of **existing site revamp**
  - **"Splash"** page to help direct people
  - Organize by highest asks and citizen needs, not government organization
  - Geolocated **development tracker** using existing Land Development database
  - **FAQs** and **Planning 101s**
  - **Plain language** approaches
  - **Updated** content

Simple, Digestible, Actionable and Graphic

Simple, Digestible, Actionable and Graphic

THURSDAY, APRIL 27

CITY BUILDING HOURS

All municipal buildings are open based on their regular hours of operation.

TRASH AND RECYCLING

Pickup is on a normal schedule today. We collect leaf and yard waste this week.

PARKING METERS

Parking meters are operating normally today.

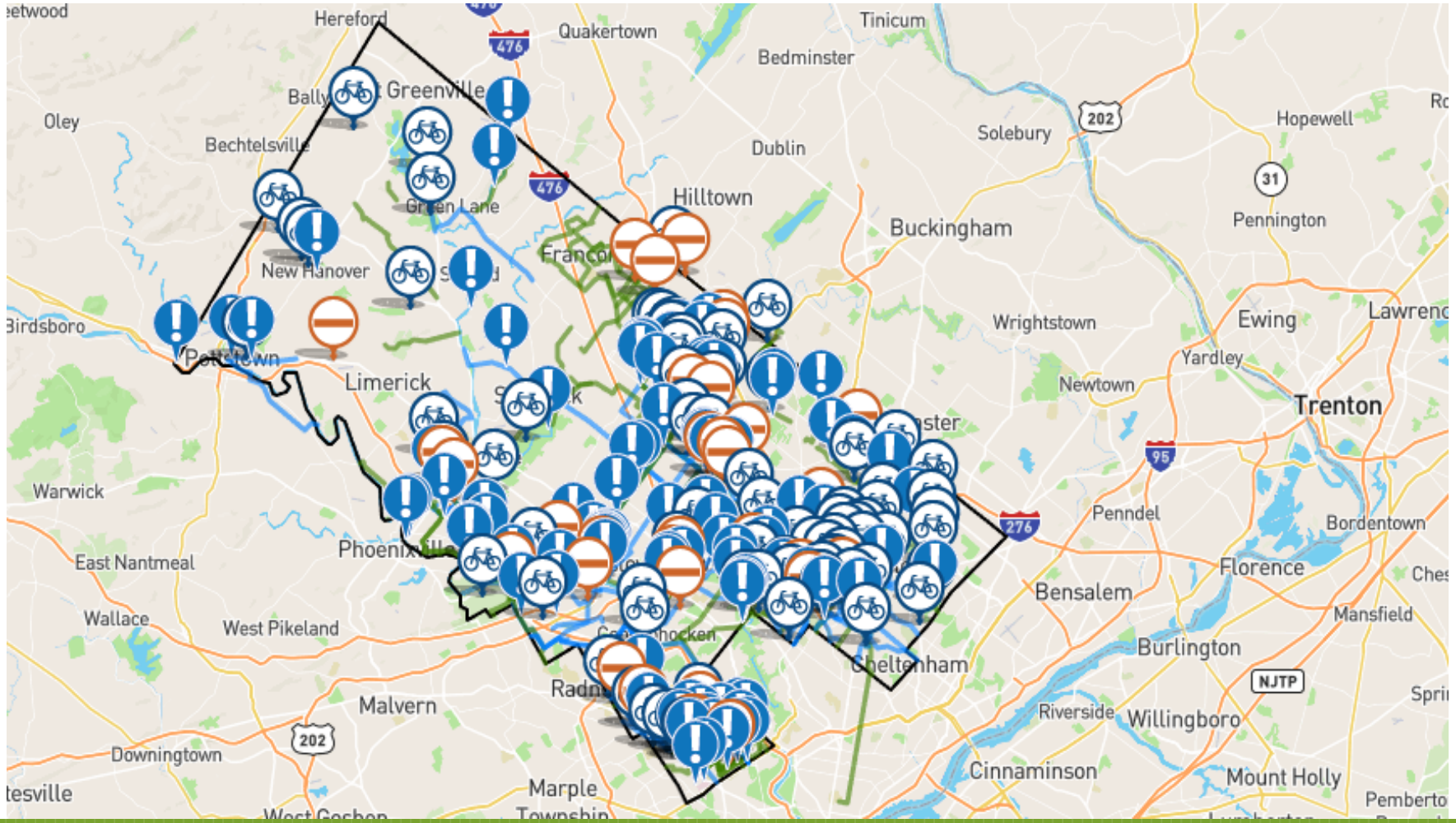
TOW LOT

The tow lot is open from 7 a.m. - 11 p.m. Automated kiosks are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week for vehicle releases.

STREET CLEANING

Today is the fourth Thursday of the month and street cleaning is running on a normal schedule.

Tools


Hereford
Quakertown
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Bedminster
Greenville
Oley
Bechtelsville
Dublin
Solebury
Hopewell
Hilltown
Buckingham
Pennington
New Hanover
Wrightstown
Ewing
Limerick
Yardley
Newtown
Trenton
Warwick
Penndel
Bordentown
East Nantmeal
Florence
Bensalem
Wallace
West Pikeland
Mansfield
Burlington
Malvern
Riverside
Willingboro
Downingtown
Cinnaminson
Mount Holly
Marple

Metrics/Performance Measures

- Increase input and ensure feedback
- Website Report Card
  - Analytics
  - Simple user surveys
- Principles for Digital Marketing and Tech Strategies:
  - Sustained user base
  - Screen sharing opportunities
  - Reduce barriers to entry

Resources and Priorities

Short-Term

- More urgency in website revamp
- Streamline, simplify, and update existing content around priority initiatives

Resources and Priorities

Longer-Term

- Create stronger social/visual media approach
- Improve the business case for engagement (akin to public safety)
- Identify tech tool that meets tech principles
- Deploy digital marketing approach around key area plan

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

- Fairfax County is viewed as a trusted source of land use information by the community of participants
- Outreach and engagement are not the same: outreach is one-way communication while engagement is two-way. Both are essential to effective community processes
- Consider collaborative process rather than forcing processes to consensus

Conclusions

- While informed participants can effectively participate in land use processes, demographic changes in the County — increases in immigrants, lifestyle renters, millennials—create the need for new approaches to outreach and engagement
- It's difficult for small business to participate even in issues relevant to them due to the demands of business operations

Conclusions

- Reaching new residents will require new techniques, including going to where these groups gather, reside and do business, and greater cultural awareness by staff
- Existing engagement processes can be augmented by strategic use of technology, particularly the County website
- Website information should be simple, accessible and graphic—geocoding immediately improves access to information

Conclusions

- To broaden participation, County processes need to move beyond reliance on HOAs, civic associations and large business organizations
- Different processes in the Magisterial Districts are acceptable as long as there is consistency in key aspects:
  - land use committee agendas are posted,
  - consistent information in plain English summary form
  - all public comments are posted and acknowledged

Recommendations – Short Term

- Accelerate website revisions as *first priority* to create widely accessible platform
- Create county-wide process template –
  - clear stages
  - buy-in before moving to the next step
  - engage citizens on their own terms
  - predictable timetable
  - use outreach and engagement strategies

Recommendations – Short Term

- Use Web analytics to find out what's important to users
- Streamline, simplify and update web content
- Provide simple overviews of development process information
- Post all land use committee agendas online in advance and in common place.

Recommendations – Short Term

- Proactively solicit and update contact info from HOAs and Civic Associations annually
- Create an opt-in list for notices that allows users in all magisterial districts to select their areas of interest (Montgomery County)

Recommendations – Long Term

- Revamp outreach efforts
  - Focus on revitalization areas for immigrant outreach rather than Countywide
  - Provide “cultural sensitivity” outreach training for staff
  - Catalogue business organizations – Chambers; Rotary, Kiwanis and service organizations; geography-based business groups; professional associations; ethnic group business organizations
  - Have information booths at fairs, festivals

Recommendations – Long Term

- Enable application electronic filing
- Provide consistent online information
- Require pre-filing outreach meeting with minutes submitted with application
- Place plain-language flyers in local gathering spots (e.g. grocery, restaurants) for land use committee meetings.

Recommendations – Long Term

- Partner with other county agencies (e.g. schools, parks) to collect electronic contact information from residents and allow people to opt-in to notifications based on their location.
- Develop public education for those interested in becoming involved (i.e. Neighborhood College) including immigrants

Recommendations – Long Term

- Post a plain language summary of existing allowable uses, density, height, etc.
- Include all public comments as appendix to staff report.
- Create project page for each application accepted—with project summary, justification statement, and links to detailed application (e.g. Arlington County)

Recommendations – Long Term

- Create stronger social/visual media approach
- Improve the business case for engagement (akin to public safety)
- Identify tech tool that meets tech principles
- Deploy digital marketing approach around key area plan

Thank you!