



# WEST BRANCH PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN

## For Planning and Development Projects

### Introduction

The City of West Branch has developed a Public Participation Plan for Planning and Development Projects that contains the policies and procedures used for public involvement and outreach in the City's approval process. This plan contains the following:

- 1. Public Participation Goals and Objectives**
- 2. Key Stakeholders in the Planning and Development Process**
- 3. State and Local Regulations**
- 4. Public Involvement Strategies**
- 5. Opportunities for Public Participation**

The City of West Branch is required by State law, the City's Code of Ordinances, City's Zoning Ordinance and the bylaws of the various Boards and Commissions it appoints to pursue public participation in planning and development projects. The City follows a public involvement process that provides information in a timely public notice and encourages early and continuing involvement of stakeholders in the planning and review process.

### Third Party Consultants

This plan does not preclude additional public involvement and, if the circumstances arise, the City may retain a third party consultant that shall adhere to the provisions of this plan, if applicable.

## Goals & Objectives

The City of West Branch has developed the following Public Participation Goals and Objectives:

1. The City of West Branch shall conduct all aspects of citizen participation in an open manner, making the participation process accessible for all interested persons.
2. The City of West Branch shall engage a diverse set of community stakeholders in planning, land use, and development decisions.
3. The City of West Branch shall seek to identify and involve a broad and representative cross-section of community's residents.
4. The City of West Branch evaluates each project on an individual basis to determine project scope, stakeholders, project limitations, approving body, points of community impact during the decision making process, internal and external resources, and level of appropriate community involvement.
5. The City of West Branch shall encourage the involvement of residents most affected by the proposed planning, land use, or development project.
6. The City of West Branch shall solicit public participation in each phase of the master planning process.
7. The City of West Branch shall make reasonable efforts to ensure continuity of involvement of citizens throughout all stages of the planning and review process.
8. The City of West Branch shall utilize effective and equitable avenues for distributing information and receiving comments that includes the City Website and City's Facebook Page.
9. The City of West Branch shall support and encourage effective participation. Information shall be made available in a timely manner, so as to enable citizens to be involved in important decisions at various stages of the review and approval process.
10. The City of West Branch shall record the results of public participation to the extent feasible and provide summaries back to the public.
11. Along with the desire to engage a diversified public in its planning processes, the City of West Branch relies on state statutes to help guide its participation activities.

## Stakeholder List

The following group of stakeholders represents a diverse set of individuals, groups and organizations that are interest or affected by the Planning and Land Use Process. Different groups may be engaged in each of the review process depending on the nature of the project, the plan, level of interest and the City's financial involvement in the project.

- City Council
- City Planning Commission
- City Recreation Commission
- Downtown Development Authority
- City Residents
- West Branch Public Schools
- Ogemaw County Chamber of Commerce
- Northeast Michigan Council of Governments
- East Michigan Council of Governments
- Ogemaw County Economic Development Corporation
- Commercial Brokers and Real Estate Professionals
- Senior Citizens
- Public Employees
- Major Local Employers
- Civic and Social Organizations
- Environmental Groups
- Ogemaw County Transit Authority
- Relevant State Agencies
- Neighborhood Groups
- Religious Groups
- Investors/Developers
- West Branch Tourism Bureau
- Ogemaw County
- Utility Service Providers
- Michigan Department of Transportation
- Emergency personnel
- Medical Personnel/Groups
- Kirtland Community College
- Railroad
- Airport Personnel

The City, through the work of City Council and individual boards and commissions, follows the local and state regulations listed below. These regulations include provisions for the public review process, public participation, and public hearings.

- Home Rule City Act (PA 279 of 1909)
- City Charter
- City Code of Ordinances
- City Zoning Ordinance
- The Michigan Open Meetings Act (PA 267 of 1976)
- The Michigan Planning Enabling Act (PA 33 of 2008)
- The Michigan Zoning Enabling Act (PA 110 of 2006)
- Brownfield Redevelopment Financing Act (PA 381 of 1996)
- Downtown Development Authority Act (PA 197 of 1975)
- Local Historic Districts Act (PA 169 of 1970)
- The Plant Rehabilitation and Industrial Development Districts Act (known as the Industrial Facilities Exemption) (PA 198 of 1974)
- The New Personal Property Exemption Act (PA 328 of 1998)
- Other relevant local and State legislation

The following methods may be used to gather the community's input on specific development proposals or the community vision for the Master Plan and other planning and zoning issues. The City may use these various activities to provide additional opportunities for citizens, public interest groups, or other stakeholders to directly participate in the development review process or the creation/amendment of plans and strategies.

The City shall communicate the results of the public participation methods in a consistent and transparent manner. More than one method of communication may be used in order to reach a broader audience and the affected persons. The results of any of the methods of engagement and outreach will be included in the report or plan generated based on the information collected during these meetings, and support the development review process.

## Inform

### Provide information, assist public understanding, and communicate results

**Website.** The City's website, [www.westbranch.com](http://www.westbranch.com), announces meetings, posts packets and agendas, minutes, and sometimes will contain pages or links for topics of major interest.

**Newspaper.** The Ogemaw County Herald is the City of West Branch's newspaper. New editions are available weekly on Thursdays.

**Printed postings.** Available for viewing at City Hall.

**Announcements.** Announcements are made during meetings of the City Council, Planning Commission and other boards and commissions.

**Press releases and Articles.** At various times, the City will issue press releases and information for articles to the Ogemaw County Herald and radio stations.

**Email or postal mail.** Interested parties may request to the City Clerk that they be notified personally of meetings/topics for discussion. The City also issues postal mailings to neighbors within 300 feet, according to statute.

**Water Bill Notices.** The City will provide information on how to obtain information or how to communicate opinion in the city water bills.

**Social Media.** The City uses a Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/cityofwestbranch](http://www.facebook.com/cityofwestbranch)) to make announcements on City activities and to encourage public feedback.

**Newsletters.** The City produces a quarterly newsletter which will be used to provide information and announcements.

## Consult

### Obtain public feedback

**Social Media.** The City currently uses Facebook to notify the community of public input meetings and of other methods of providing input.

**Surveys.** The City utilizes online and paper surveys for the collection of large amounts of data and opinions from the public.

**Public Hearings.** Public attendance at meetings is strongly supported and allows for an appropriate venue for public input.

## Involve

### Work directly with public throughout the process

**Open Houses.** In order to create two-way communication, the City may hold open house events for projects and initiatives as needed.

**Steering/Advisory Committees.** The City may organize steering/advisory committees consisting of residents, business owners, board and commission members, and other identified stakeholders. Members may be selected based on their expertise, interest, and background as they relate to the focus of the individual steering committee. This structure will allow for focused discussions related to a specific topic. Meetings will be open to the public, and a synopsis of the meeting may be posted online. The results of the meetings and discussions of the steering committees will be incorporated into the plan generated based on the information collected during these meetings.

**Community Workshops, Visioning Sessions or Focus Groups.** The City may conduct focus groups, visioning sessions or community workshops for gathering the community's opinion on specific issues, development proposals, development sites of major importance, or the community vision, as needed. A variety of groups may be invited to attend the focus groups depending on the location and nature of the development site or project. The results of these meetings will be included in any report or plan generated based on the community feedback collected during these meetings.

**Charrettes/Design Workshop.** The City may engage the community through charrettes or design workshops. This tool may most often be used for specific development projects that involve significant changes to the urban form and require public input on the design layout. The City may encourage developers to hold charrettes for specific proposed projects with significant community interest.

**One-on-One Interviews.** The City may hold interviews with various stakeholders to get specific information on a topic. In general, the information collected during interviews will be kept confidential unless requested otherwise. The information may be compiled and analyzed together with other information collected from stakeholders on a specific topic.

## Feedback on effectiveness of participation methods

**External Satisfaction Survey.** In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the public participation method, *participants* may be asked to complete a survey to evaluate the following:

- How the attendee heard about the event.
- Whether the event was held at a convenient location and time.
- If the attendee was satisfied with the event.
- Suggestions for improvement.

**Internal Satisfaction Survey.** In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the public participation method, *facilitators* may be asked to complete a survey to evaluate the following:

- The number of attendees.
- Whether any groups were under-represented.
- Suggestions for improvements.

The City provides West Branch residents, and stakeholders in general, with numerous opportunities to get involved in the planning, review, and approval process for planning and zoning processes, community visioning, and development projects.

### Development Review Bodies

The City encourages citizen participation in local government planning and policy decisions. All residents are invited to apply for appointments to City boards and commissions. Vacant positions are advertised on the City's website at [www.westbranch.com](http://www.westbranch.com).

#### **City Council**

The City Council is the governing body for the City of West Branch. The Council consists of seven members who serve two-year terms.

The Mayor is the City's chief executive official and presides over meetings of the Council.

The City Council is the legislative authority and governing body for the city. It is responsible for hiring and overseeing the City Manager, setting policy and adopting ordinances and resolutions. One of the most important policies is budgetary which is carried out through reviewing and adopting the annual budget which funds the city's operations, capital projects and council's priorities for each fiscal year which begins in July.

#### **Planning Commission**

The Planning Commission prepares and adopts physical plans for the City and reviews development proposals, both private and public as set forth in the Michigan Zoning Enabling Act, 2006 PA 110 and the Michigan Planning Enabling Act, 2008 PA 33 and acts in an advisory capacity for matters referred by the City Council. The Planning Commission has the authority to approve site plans and Special Land Uses. In addition, the Planning Commission makes recommendations to the City Council for Zoning Ordinance text and map amendments.

#### **Zoning Board of Appeals**

The Zoning Board of Appeals has the power to authorize, upon an appeal, specific variances from requirements such as lot area and width regulations, building height regulations, yard and depth regulations and off-street parking and loading space requirements. The ZBA hears appeals related to the administration of the zoning ordinance including the interpretation of text and the zoning map.

## Downtown Development Authority (DDA)

The West Branch DDA is designed to promote commerce in the Downtown District through beautification and economic development while preserving the historic aesthetics of the downtown community. Some of the responsibilities and duties of the DDA are operation & maintenance of the downtown street lighting including the decorating of the light poles during the holidays and the addition of flags through the summer season. The Authority provides the Christmas lights for all of the trees in the downtown area, the snow removal of the downtown walks, as well as the purchase, planting and maintenance of the summer flowers that adorn the streets throughout the district.

There are other boards and committees throughout the City. Agendas and dates/times of the meetings can be found on the front page of the City's website at: [www.westbranch.com](http://www.westbranch.com). Minutes for these meetings can be found under the "Government" tab on the website.

## Public Meetings

**Open Meetings.** All meetings of the City Council and its various boards and commissions shall be open to the public in accordance with the "Open Meetings Act," 1976 PA 267, as amended, except closed session meetings as provided for in the Act. Public notices for these meetings are printed in the paper and hung at City Hall (as required by the Act).

**Universal Access.** All meetings shall be held in a facility accessible to persons with disabilities and the City shall provide reasonable accommodations, such as interpreters for the hearing impaired and audiotapes of printed materials being considered at this meeting, upon notice to the City of West Branch prior to the meeting. Individuals with disabilities requiring reasonable accommodations or services should contact either the City Manager's or City Clerk's office.

**Meeting Schedule.** The public will be notified within 10 days of the first meeting of a public body in each calendar or fiscal year; the body will publically post a list stating the dates, times and places of all its regular meetings at City Hall.

If there is a change in schedule, within three days of the meeting in which the change is made, the public body will post a notice stating the new dates, times and places of regular meetings.

For special meetings, public bodies will post a notice indicating the date, time and place at least 18 hours before the meetings.

Public bodies will hold emergency sessions without a written notice or time constraints if the public health, safety or welfare is severely threatened and if two-thirds of the body's members vote to hold the emergency meeting.

## Public Access to Information

Individual boards and commission will hold public meetings pursuant to the boards' and commissions' bylaws and State regulations. As required by law, the City of West Branch will provide the public reasonable and timely access to information and records relating to the Community Master Plan, Public Participation Plan, Zoning Ordinance, DDA Plan, other plans and ordinances, and amendments to any of the plans and ordinances.

**Meeting Postings.** Interested persons are encouraged to check the event calendar on the City's website at [www.westbranch.com](http://www.westbranch.com), the City's Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/cityofwestbranch](http://www.facebook.com/cityofwestbranch), or at City Hall in order to be kept informed of any meeting/hearing changes or cancellations.

**Meeting Location.** Meetings/hearings take place in the West Branch City Hall Council Chambers which is barrier-free and accessible to the entire community. At specific times, meetings may be held at neighborhood locations to better accommodate residents. All meetings are held in a facility accessible to persons with disabilities, and The City provides and will provide reasonable accommodations. Individuals with disabilities requiring reasonable accommodations or services should contact the City Manager's Office.

**Agendas and Public Hearing Notices.** Meeting and public hearing agendas and packets are available ahead of time either on the City's website or through City Clerk's Office. Meeting agendas relating to a specific application are mailed to applicants. Public hearing notices are sent to applicants and stakeholders. The following processes require that neighbors within 300 feet of a property are personally notified:

- Rezoning of property
- Special Land Use
- Variance requests

Statutes require these processes be noticed in the Ogemaw County Herald as well as mailed to neighbors within 300 feet at least 15 days prior to the meeting.

**Minutes.** The City Council's meetings are recorded. Draft meeting/hearing minutes are, by law, available 8 business days after the meeting to which they refer. Approved meeting/hearing minutes are posted on the City's website (under the Government tab) following approval.

**Hard Copies of Documents.** Copies of all documents will be available at the following locations:

- West Branch City Hall – 121 N 4<sup>th</sup> Street, West Branch, MI 48661
- On The City's website - [www.westbranch.com](http://www.westbranch.com)

## Public Comments

Opportunities for public comment shall be available at any meeting of the City Council or City boards and commissions in accordance with the provisions in the boards and commission's bylaws and other operating policies. The meeting agenda allows for public comments under the 'Public Comment' section. The participation of interested persons and their input shall be recorded in the meeting minutes.

Approved meeting minutes, which include the outcome of the public participation, are made available to the public through various methods, including being posted on the City’s website.

## Public Hearings

The City Council and its various boards and commissions shall hold public hearings when called for in their local and State enabling legislation, or when otherwise prudent, to provide the opportunity for public comment on specific topics.

### **Planning Commission**

The Planning Commission holds public hearings in response to requests for Special Use Permits, Planned Unit Developments, and Zoning Amendment Requests. The Zoning Administrator shall schedule and publish the notification of a public hearing before the Planning Commission in the Ogemaw County Herald not less than 15 days prior to the hearing. Land use and development application notifications shall be sent by mail to the applicant, the owner of the subject property, and, if the case of a Special Land Use or rezoning, to the owners of property within 300 feet of the subject property. The Planning Commission meeting agenda and meeting packet shall be made available on the City’s website in advance of the meeting. The applicant shall receive written notification of the Planning Commission’s determination.

### **City Council**

The City Council shall hold a public hearing when called for in their enabling legislation and as required for the review of business tax or financial assistance applications, following the notice requirements set in the local and state legislation.

### **Other Boards and Commissions**

Other relevant boards and commissions will hold public hearings as needed and as required by the individual boards and commissions bylaws. The public hearings will be noticed as required in advance of the meeting. All meeting agendas and packets shall be made available before the meeting on the City’s website.

## Development Review Opportunities

### **Master Plan Adoption or Amendment**

The City of West Branch will follow, at a minimum, the provisions of 2008 PA 33, as amended (the Michigan Planning Enabling Act, M.C.L. 125.3801 et. seq.) for the adoption of a new Master Plan or of an update to the existing Master Plan.

The Planning Commission will send a notice to all stakeholders as listed in the State enabling legislation; the notice will explain that the Planning Commission intends to prepare a plan and request cooperation and comment on the plan now and when the plan is drafted.

The Planning Commission and the City will then begin work on drafting or updating the plan. They shall involve the public through many of the methods listed in the section Public Involvement Strategies. The City shall encourage the involvement and participation of all stakeholders, including any marginalized groups that may be typically less involved in the planning process. Stakeholder involvement is encouraged

from the beginning and the results of such public participation are made available to the community and participants and incorporated as much as is reasonably possible in the drafted plan or plan amendment.

In preparation, studies of existing conditions and probable growth should be done for the basis of the plan. The Planning Commission may make use of expert advice and information from Federal, State, County, and Municipal officials, departments, and agencies having information, maps, and data pertinent to the City. The City may consult with representatives of adjacent local units of government with respect to their planning so that conflicts in master plans and zoning may be avoided. The City may cooperate with all departments of the State and Federal governments, public transportation agencies, and other public agencies concerned with programs for economic, social, and physical development within the planning jurisdiction and seek the maximum coordination of the local unit of government's programs with these agencies.

The City shall encourage and track the public participation through a variety of means, including minutes, public recording of meetings, comment cards, sign-up sheets, and input received verbally, through written correspondence or through website comments, and other means as appropriate.

The Planning Commission will act to submit the proposed plan to the City Council for review and comment. The process of adopting the Master Plan shall not proceed further unless the City Council approves the distribution of the proposed plan.

The City Council shall act on the proposed plan during a public meeting held in accordance with the Open Meetings Act. The City Council shall decide on the approval of the distribution of the proposed plan to local governments and agencies for review and comments.

If the City Council approves the distribution of the proposed plan, the City shall transmit, in the manner provided by the State enabling law, a copy of the proposed plan, for review and comment, to all of the units listed in the State enabling law. These entities may submit comments on the proposed plan to the Planning Commission within 63 days after the proposed plan was submitted to that entity.

Before approving the proposed Master Plan, the Planning Commission shall hold not less than one public hearing on the proposed plan. The hearing shall be held after the expiration of the deadline for comment. The Planning Commission shall give notice of the time and place of the public hearing not less than 15 days before the hearing by publication in the Ogemaw County Herald. The Planning Commission shall also submit notice of the public hearing to the entities that received initial communication.

The proposed plan must be approved by resolution of the Planning Commission. A statement recording the Planning Commission's approval of the plan, signed by the chairperson or secretary of the Planning Commission, shall be included on the inside of the front or back cover of the Master Plan. Following approval of the proposed Master Plan, the secretary of the Planning Commission shall submit a copy of the plan to the City Council.

Approval of the proposed plan by the Planning Commission is the final step for adoption of the plan, unless the City Council by resolution has asserted the right to approve or reject the plan. In that case, after approval of the proposed plan by the Planning Commission, the City Council shall approve or reject the proposed plan. A statement recording the City Council's approval of the Master Plan, signed by the City Clerk, shall be included on the inside of the front or back cover of the Master Plan if the City Council takes action on the Plan. After the adoption of the Master Plan, the City of West Branch shall publish and

distribute copies of the Master Plan to stakeholders required by State law. In addition, the City will use public participation methods listed in Section 4 to inform the public of the availability of the Master Plan.

### **Zoning Ordinance Adoption or Amendment**

The Planning Commission may of its own motion, or shall upon petition for a Zoning Amendment, prepare an ordinance amending or changing the district boundaries or district regulations. In most cases, applications for amendment are due 45 days before the next meeting of the Planning Commission in order to meet the public hearing notice requirements. The ordinance will be noticed in the Ogemaw County Herald at least 15 days prior to the hearing.

Prior to submitting its recommendation to the City Council, the Planning Commission will hold a public hearing. After the public hearing, the Planning Commission shall forward its recommendation to City Council. The City Council shall act to adopt or reject the amendment.

Following adoption of the ordinance to amend, supplement or change the district boundaries or the district regulations, the ordinance will be filed with the City Clerk, and a notice of the ordinance adoption will be published in the Ogemaw County Herald within 15 days after adoption. The ordinance or amendment will take effect on the eighth day after its publication.

### **Site Plan Review/Special Use Review/Zoning Board of Appeals Request**

The public is given the opportunity to voice their opinion, support or concerns during the site plan review, special land use, or Zoning Board of Appeals process. Site plan review is conducted during a regular (or special) meeting of the Planning Commission without a public hearing. Special Use review or Zoning Board of Appeals review is conducted during a public hearing which is noticed according to the Public Hearings section above. Flowcharts depicting review processes are contained within the Appendix.

### **DDA Plan and Projects**

The public is given the opportunity to review projects that are the responsibility of the DDA. The DDA uses a variety of the methods discussed in Chapter 4 to inform the public and gather comments.

## **Updating the Public Participation Plan**

Like all documents, the City of West Branch understands that the Public Participation Plan will need to be reviewed and updated on a routine basis. This plan will be updated as needed, at a minimum of every 5 years, in conjunction with the City's Master Plan. Updates to this plan will be drafted by staff, reviewed and recommended by Planning Commission, and approved through City Council. At least one public hearing will be held during the process to gather community input and to generate new ideas.