



Public Participation Plan City of River Rouge, Michigan

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary

1	Introduction	1
1.1	Planning Problem	1
1.2	Vision and Goals of the Plan	2
1.3	Case studies	3
1.4	Benefits of Public Engagement	5
2	State and Local Regulations	7
2.1	State Regulations on Public Participation	7
2.2	Local Regulations and plans	8
3	Identification of Key Stakeholders and Assets	10
3.1	Stakeholders	10
3.2	Equity in stakeholder engagement	12
3.3	Asset Audit	13
3.4	Capacity Audit	16
3.5	Guide to Asset Mapping	16
4	Analysis	19
4.1	Methods	19
4.2	Results	19
5	Scenario-Specific Campaign Template	23
5.1	Master/Land Use Plans	23
5.2	Zoning Code Amendment	23
5.3	Infrastructure/Public Development Projects	24
5.4	Downtown Development Association (DDA) Projects	24
5.5	Private Development Projects with Substantial Impact	25
6	Public Participation Toolbox	27
6.1	Outreach Strategies	28
6.2	Engagement Strategies	30
6.3	Incentives	36
7	Communicating Results	39
8	Evaluating Engagement	40
9	Project Team	41
10	Bibliography	43
	Appendices	i
A1:	Explanation of Section 5 Symbols	i
A2:	Survey Questions	ii
A3:	Additional Survey Results	iii
A4:	RRC Checklist	iv
A5:	List of Faith Groups in River Rouge	v

Executive Summary

River Rouge is a resilient and close-knit community. Many of its current residents have a multi-generational history in River Rouge. The city has a long history of citizen-led movements and consensus-building, and its public events and festivals are well-attended by residents. However, resident engagement with formal City-led processes is minimal. Public input in planning and policy development is crucial to building trust, achieving residents' vision for the future, and choosing strategies that make a difference to people's quality of life. Through this public participation plan, we highlight some key strategies and techniques that build on existing resources to increase community engagement.

Introduction

An effective **Public Participation Plan (PPP)** will help engage more residents in governance and help build a stronger, resilient network for future planning efforts and investments. Public Participation in the City of River Rouge should be continuous, accessible, equitable and representative, transparent, effective and responsive, and asset-based. Through a comparison of three public participation plans, we condense the successes and shortcomings of the planning efforts and formulate strategies for a successful River Rouge public participation plan.

State & Local Recommendations

Three important state laws that regulate Public Participation are 1) the Michigan Open Meetings Act, 2) the Michigan Planning Enabling Act, and 3) the Michigan Zoning Enabling act. This section contains a brief discussion of the notable requirements stipulated in each Act.

Identification of Key Stakeholders and Assets

This plan uses an **asset-based community development approach**. The method provides information about the existing strengths and resources within a community and leverages these strategies to uncover solutions. We have identified key stakeholders and assets including individuals, businesses, religious organizations, community organizations, local landmarks, city-based public entities, adjacent cities, Wayne County, SEMCOG, the State of Michigan, and the US Environmental Protection Agency. Identifying historically disadvantaged and underrepresented groups is an important way to promote equity in stakeholder engagement.

Analysis

We conducted interviews with city officials and surveys with the general public to gather data on current participation strategies and rates to make feasible and helpful recommendations for public participation in River Rouge. Qualitative data from the informational interviews and surveys were analyzed using thematic analysis. Quantitative data from the surveys were analyzed using descriptive statistics. This analysis showed that **generating personal and community interest** around participation and **using a variety of information-sharing techniques** are necessary for maximizing engagement potential.

Scenario-Specific Campaign Template

These templates are a flexible starting point for when opportunities for public participation arise. Outreach strategies, engagement strategies, and key stakeholders are identified for example planning initiatives such as master and land use plans, zoning code amendments, infrastructure or public development projects, Downtown Development Association projects, and private development projects.

Public Participation Toolbox

This section identifies strategies and techniques that the city can use to identify outreach strategies and engagement techniques. Outreach strategies are best practices for the city to reach people and inform them about planning and development processes. Engagement techniques focus on the people-to-city pathways for participation. Each strategy is labeled with the financial, staffing, and temporal resources needed in addition to the level of engagement. Engagement and incentive strategies are also divided into short-term and long-term categories.

Communicating Results

River Rouge is committed to keeping the community informed as the city proceeds with planning and public participation. This section summarizes the methods that River Rouge can use to communicate public feedback in the future based on the engagement level.

Evaluating Engagement

All public participation efforts will be recorded by the City's departments and reviewed on a routine basis. The City will analyze public participation for each project separately. Evaluation metrics are suggested based on current engagement patterns.

01

Introduction

Planning Problem

Goals and Objectives

Case Studies



Introduction

The City of River Rouge (River Rouge) needs a **Public Participation Plan** (PPP) to qualify for funding from the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC). River Rouge will benefit from the construction of PPP based on an **Asset Based Community Development** (ABCD) approach. The ABCD model promotes equitable urban development by identifying strengths and critical gaps in River Rouge's public engagement efforts. An effective PPP will help engage more residents in governance and help build a stronger, resilient network for future planning efforts and investments.

1.1 Planning Problem

In the face of economic challenges, River Rouge is a resilient community with great potential. It weathered the 2008 financial crisis without an emergency manager, and the city has found ways to adapt to dwindling incomes by increasing tax rates and embracing controversial albeit high-value businesses.¹ But, like many Midwestern cities established around manufacturing, River Rouge has experienced economic decline in the last few decades because of industry withdrawal. Property values have decreased by 47% in the last decade and a decline in population has only exacerbated these economic conditions. In the 1940s, the city had over 21,000 residents; today its population is under 7,500 with 37.6% of residents living below the poverty line.² Despite these falling property values, River Rouge residents pay increasingly high property taxes³ and two-thirds of renters pay over 30% of their annual income in rent.⁴

An effective PPP will address the City's mismatch between community connectivity and formal public participation. We learned that River Rouge is a close-knit community; many of its citizens are multi-generational residents. The City has a long history of citizen-led movements and consensus-building. Its events and festivals are well attended. However, public engagement with formal processes is currently minimal. For example, during the Master-Planning process in 2017, the Community Development Department hand-delivered 2,700 surveys to residents' homes. Despite this targeted effort, only 27 completed surveys were returned.⁵

Based on a literature review and our initial research of the City's history and current conditions, the River Rouge PPP addresses the following objectives:

- **Audit River Rouge's current public engagement.** What is the City doing well? What are potential barriers to resident participation in meetings and planning activities?
- **Understand strengths and assets in the community.** What are community institutions and focal points?⁶ How does social capital work in River Rouge?⁷ What are the "bridging and bonding" linkages⁸ between residents and with the City?
- **Strategize a way-forward for the city.** How can River Rouge improve public participation? How can residents feel that their voices are heard in the city?
- **Prepare a roadmap for implementation.** Can we develop a systematic guide to public engagement that any city official can pick up and adopt?
- **Submit a plan that meets MEDC criteria.** Can the River Rouge PPP also be used to apply for the Rebuilding Resilient Communities grant?

The MEDC requires that municipalities have a PPP to qualify as a Redevelopment Ready Community. These plans must:

- Identify key stakeholders, especially from historically marginalized groups
- Describe public participation methods, designating appropriate venues for each method, including both traditional and proactive engagement methods
- Create a system by which results of public participation exercises are reported to the community and participants
- Expand avenues for the community to regularly review and update the plan.

1.2 Vision and Goals of the Plan

Public Participation in the City of River Rouge should be:

Continuous: Engagement and outreach will be dependable and routine; there will be a strong, structured system of engagement in place to ensure continuity for all residents.

Accessible: Good faith efforts will be made to reach all City of River Rouge residents including those who may face challenges related to physical and/or mental disabilities, work schedules, family life commitments, or technological barriers.

Equitable and Representative: All River Rouge residents will be welcomed into the discussions that proceed decision making processes.

Transparent: The City will communicate thoroughly and honestly about its decision making process and the results from its engagement efforts.

Effective and Responsive: The methods of engagement selected by the City will be fruitful and comprehensive; residents will feel that the community's ideas and criticisms are received and acted upon.

Asset-based: Engagement will focus on the assets already existent in the community rather than solely a needs based approach.



River Rouge resident holds a conversation with a health provider at a resource fair.

Photo: Mitch Doig

1.3 Case studies

In this section, we review how different cities across the United States address public engagement challenges. Through a comparison of three public participation plans, we will attempt to condense the successes and shortcomings of the planning efforts and formulate strategies for a successful River Rouge public participation plan.

We have selected Blissfield, Michigan; Trenton, New Jersey; and Fort Collins, Colorado for comparison. We selected these cities for various reasons:

- Blissfield, Michigan operates under the same regulations as River Rouge. Their plan shows a strong understanding of the Requirements for Redevelopment Ready Communities (RRC), providing a guide for city staff in River Rouge to pick up and implement.
- Trenton, New Jersey has a similar demographic profile to River Rouge. Its public participation efforts garnered funding from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Entitlement Program.
- Fort Collins, Colorado is another example of well-regarded practice in participatory planning. By creating a public engagement guide, Fort Collins adopted a unique approach to public participation planning. General and specific plans created in consonance with the Fort Collins Public Engagement Guide have won several awards.

1.3.1 Blissfield, Michigan

Blissfield, Michigan is located in southeast Michigan, which is not far from River Rouge. Blissfield adopted a new Public Participation Plan (PPP) in February 2022.⁹ This recent plan aims to create more effective communication between the local government and the residents. The goal is to make it easier for the government to understand the needs of residents and engage the community in various planning developments.

Blissfield is located 60 miles southwest of River Rouge. The Blissfield plan was created for RRC certification. The Blissfield plan is presented in a clear, concise and legible format. We selected Blissfield because it is an example of a PPP that addresses all the RRC requirements and is still a very clear and communicative plan.

The Blissfield PPP meets all the requirements listed by the State of Michigan. Implementation strategies are illustrated in the form of checklists and tables. This format succeeds in guiding city staff by providing actionable steps to implementing best practices in Public Participation. We extensively referred to the Blissfield PPP when developing a public participation plan in River Rouge.

Although the Blissfield plan is very clear, it has some limitations. The demographic composition of Blissfield is starkly different from River Rouge. In River Rouge, approximately half of the citizens are African American, but in Blissfield, over 95% of the residents are white. The socio-economic situation in the two communities are also very different. Because of the vulnerable groups like people living in poverty, non-English speakers and a significant senior population in River Rouge, many of the strategies in the Blissfield plan may not be applicable. River Rouge needs more creative and proactive approaches to engagement.

1.3.2 Trenton, New Jersey

The City of Trenton, New Jersey adopted a new Citizen Participation Plan in April 2020.¹⁰ This plan is part of the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Community Development Block Grant (CBDG) Entitlement Program, which provides annual grants to qualified cities to develop viable urban communities through expanding housing and economic opportunities, particularly for low- and moderate-income residents.

We selected Trenton because it is a larger city that has similar demographics to River Rouge. The Trenton plan outlines strategies for citizen inclusion in the planning process and explains how to qualify for grant funding. Grant eligibility is a pressing matter in River Rouge, so it is helpful to look at how the City of Trenton balanced these two objectives within their Citizen Participation Plan and apply these tactics.

The Trenton Citizen Participation Plan has many elements of a successful plan. It is clear that providing a voice to historically underserved communities is a priority for the City of Trenton and this comes through strongly in this plan. The Trenton Citizen Participation Plan emphasizes an accessibility-based foundation to participation by providing services for non-English speaking people and people with disabilities.

Although this plan is generally strong, strategies to increase the total amount of participation are lacking. The Citizen Participation Plan explains how it will gather input and allow for participation, but there are few active methods to encourage participation among the average citizens. The plan also lacks visual components that could improve the aesthetics and readability.

1.3.3 Fort Collins, Colorado

Fort Collins, Colorado adopted a unique approach to public participation planning. In 2012 the City created a “Public Engagement Guide” (PEG).¹¹ The guide provides a framework and set of tools for public participation planning. The City also decided to create project-specific public participation plans for all upcoming plans.

We selected Fort Collins because their approach has been commended multiple times. The Public Engagement Guide was highlighted by the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) as a best practice. Further, the public participation component of two plans prepared in accordance with the guide – the Master Plan in 2018 and the Active Modes Plan in 2021 – were recognized with awards from the Colorado Chapter of the American Planning Association.

The primary drawback of Fort Collin’s approach is the plan’s weak fact base. The plan draws heavily from secondary sources like the IAP2 framework and the City of Fort Saskatchewan’s public participation plan. The principles of public engagement and characteristics of successful plans that the PEG emphasizes are vague with no measurable indicators. There is little background given about the current and future conditions of Fort Collins or detailing how the identified participatory methods can fit into the city’s nuances. When learning from this plan, River Rouge needs to set clear and specific principles to ensure PPP methods could work effectively.

1.4 Benefits of Public Engagement

There are several benefits to an effective public participation strategy. Some are:

- Promoting better communication between the public and the government.
- Enabling the government to better understand the requirements of the citizens.
- Empowering stakeholders with rights to protect their own benefits.
- Making decisions that reflect public interests and values.
- Helping to overcome differences and build trust.



River Rouge is a community that can quickly escalate its engagement network and excel at public participation. Patty Campbell and Mike Bowdler pose for a picture with a young River Rouge resident.

Photo: Mitch Doig

02

State & Local Regulations

Michigan Open Meetings Act

Michigan Planning Enabling Act

Michigan Zoning Enabling Act

Local Plans & Regulations



State and Local Regulations

This section introduces the legal and policy framework that Public Participation in River Rouge must comply with.

2.1 State Regulations on Public Participation

The three important state laws that regulate Public Participation are 1) the Michigan Open Meetings Act, 2) the Michigan Planning Enabling Act and 3) the Michigan Zoning Enabling act. A brief discussion of the notable requirements stipulated in each Act follows:

2.2.1 Michigan Open Meetings Act

In accordance with the Michigan Open Meetings Act (PA 267 of 1976):

- The City of River Rouge will hold meetings in the Court Room on the second floor of the River Rouge City Hall building, which is located at: 10600 W Jefferson Ave, River Rouge, MI 48218.
- The meeting agenda and dates will be posted in advance on the city website: <https://cityofriverrouge.com/?s=meeting>
- The City Clerk will notify the public within ten (10) days of the first meeting of a public body in each calendar or fiscal year; the City will publicly post a list stating the dates, times, and places of all its regular meetings at its principal office.
- If there is a change in schedule, within three (3) days of the the meeting, the City Clerk will post a notice stating the new dates, times, and places of regular meetings.
- A regular meeting of the City or a public body which is recessed for more than 36 hours can only be reconvened if notice is posted 18 hours in advance.
- For special and irregular meetings, the City and public bodies will post a notice indicating the date, times, and place at least 18 hours before the meeting.
- The City or public bodies can hold emergency sessions without a written notice or time constraints if the public health, safety, and welfare is severely threatened and if two-thirds of the body's members vote to hold the emergency meeting.

2.1.2 Michigan Planning Enabling Act

In accordance with the Michigan Planning Enabling Act (PA 33 of 2008):

- The City will notify registered and required parties via first-class mail or personal delivery by the planning commission of the intent to prepare a master plan and request the recipient's cooperation and comment.
- After preparing a proposed Master Plan, the River Rouge Planning Commission shall submit the proposed master plan to City Council for review and 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 a newspaper of general circulation within the local unit of government. The Planning Commission will also submit notice of the public hearing by first class mail, personal delivery, or email to the previously listed entities for review.
- Upon adoption by the Planning Commission, the City Council may vote to adopt the same version of the plan.

2.1.3 Michigan Zoning Enabling Act

In accordance with the Michigan Zoning Enabling Act (PA 110 of 2006)

- The River Rouge City Council may require the submission and approval of a site plan before authorization of any land use or activity regulated by zoning ordinance. The zoning ordinance will specify the public body or official responsible for reviewing plans and granting approval.
- The City shall publish notice of any public hearing connected to zoning or permission in a newspaper of general circulation in the local unit of government not less than 15 days before the date of the hearing.
- In the event of a petition to change or obtain variances in the use or intensity of land:
- Notice must be given to all persons whose real property is assessed within 300 feet of the property that is the subject of the request and to the occupants of all structures within 300 feet of the property.
- The city's notice must:
 1. Describe the nature of the request or petition.
 2. Indicate the property that is the subject of the request.
 3. State when and where the request will be considered.
 4. Indicate when and where written comments will be received concerning the request.

2.2 Local Regulations and plans

In addition to the three important three state laws, the City of River Rouge adheres to the following regulations on public participation:

[River Rouge City Charter](#)

[City of River Rouge, Code of Ordinances](#)

[Downtown Development Authority Act \(PA 197 of 1975\)](#)

[Economic Development Corporation Act \(Act 338 of 1974\)](#)

[River Rouge Master Plan \(2017\)](#)

03

Assets & Stakeholders

Stakeholders

Equity in Stakeholder Engagement

Asset Audit

Capacity Audit

Guide to Asset Mapping



Identification of Key Stakeholders and Assets

An asset-based plan for River Rouge relies on leveraging community strengths and planning along community priorities. Stakeholder identification, engagement, feedback, and participation within city affairs can ensure that planning represents all members of the community. Similarly, asset mapping can ensure that staff use community resources effectively.

3.1 Stakeholders

Stakeholders are the individuals, groups, and organizations that have an interest in or are affected by community development and planning. Different plans may engage diverse groups of stakeholders, based on the scale, level of community interest, and the potential impact of the project. The following is a non-exhaustive list of local, state, and federal organizations from both the public and private sectors that may have a stake in River Rouge's planning and development.

3.1.1 Businesses

Small Business Owners: Small businesses serve as community centers, collect and distribute local knowledge, and bolster the city against fluctuations in larger business activities.

Large Industrial Landowners: DTE, Conrail and US Steel are large landowners in River Rouge and have ongoing partnerships with the City. DTE and US Steel have shut down operations but continue to have a presence in the city.

River Rouge Economic Development Commission (EDC): The EDC is the officially recognized representative group of the above stakeholders.

Downriver Community Conference: A non-profit community and economic development organization (located in Southgate, MI) who invests in River Rouge's economic development.

Dispensaries: There are multiple marijuana dispensaries in River Rouge who actively contribute to the local economy as well as community activities.

3.1.2 Religious Organizations

A list of all religious establishments within city borders is in the appendix A5

Christian Churches: Christian churches of all denominations play a role in the social and charity network of River Rouge. Those who participate actively in the community through church-led opportunities may not necessarily be reached in government-led outreach and engagement.

Other Religious Groups: More surveys are needed to determine what other faith based networks are present in the River Rouge community. If there are Muslim, Jewish or Hindu residents, for example, connecting with these individuals may strengthen the City's outreach and networking.

3.1.3 Community Organizations / Local Non-Profits:

No Kid Without a Christmas: Raises funds to provide local children with supplies and gifts¹² throughout the year for school, recreation, and holidays. It has garnered a ton of community support and recognition.
Contact: Bridgette Bowdler

RICH: The Resource Information Center for the Helpless (RICH) Provides economic advising and necessities (clothing, hygiene supplies, etc.) to adults in the community.¹³
Contact: Donna Eady

Pantry of Hope: A mobile soup kitchen that sets up outside Ann Visger elementary every Wednesday.¹⁴
Contact: Tarance Wheeler

Wayne County Metro: Provides services such as housing stability and children's services to the Wayne County community.
Contact: waynemetro.org

3.1.4 City-Based Public Entities

School Board: The local leaders of the public schools within River Rouge. As a result of Michigan's School of Choice policy, River Rouge public schools can be attended by non-residents.

Public Housing: The River Rouge public housing district includes River Rouge, and parts of Ecorse, Melvindale, and Boynton (Detroit)

Local Government: City departments most concerned with planning and development of River Rouge are:

DPW: Manages city services (utilities, material waste, snow removal, etc.)
Contact: Mike Bowdler Jr & Kelli Onufrak

Community Development: Handles public engagement and city board; encompasses planning, zoning, the DDA, the EDC, etc.
Contact: Karl Laub

Consultant Planning/Zoning Administrator: currently serves in a part-time staff role through contract with McKenna and handles planning and zoning administration for the city.
Contact: McKenna Assoc.

Police and Fire: manage public safety events and concerns within the city; Frequently interact with residents and have a presence at most city events
Contact: Roberto Cruz

3.1.5 Adjacent Cities

River Rouge borders Detroit and Ecorse. Lincoln Park, Wyandotte, and Melvindale are in close proximity. These cities have an effect on local planning, local economic development, and the social community in River Rouge.

3.1.6 Wayne County

River Rouge has a close relationship with Wayne County. The County is responsible for the maintenance of roads and infrastructure in River Rouge and often supports other city initiatives.¹⁵

3.1.7 SEMCOG

The South-East Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG) funds and leads many regional projects, grants, and policies. They have a robust and capable planning department.¹⁶

3.1.8 State of Michigan

Because River Rouge is in the state of Michigan, the City must comply with state laws and regulations and is eligible for a variety of state grants and programs.

3.1.9 United States Environmental Protection Agency

Because of River Rouge's industrial history, a significant number of parcels have serious environmental concerns associated with them. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is a branch of the federal government that looks into issues of pollution and cleanup and has a stake in city development discussions.

3.2 Equity in stakeholder engagement

The city of River Rouge strives to reach all residents especially those who are not normally at the visioning table.

3.2.1 Identifying Historically Disadvantaged/ Underrepresented Groups

To accommodate underrepresented resident groups, the public participation plan recommends the following policies.

Non-English Speaking

The HUD threshold for providing language appropriate information is 5% of the population or 1,000 people of a given language group. In River Rouge approximately 630 residents are non-native English speakers. This represents around 9% (±2) of the population,¹⁷ among this section of the population, 150+ are not fluent in English. To encourage representation from these groups the City should offer notices and other significant information in Spanish when possible.

“La información será proporcionada en español a petición.”

Persons with Disabilities

In River Rouge, 17.3% of residents have a disability.¹⁸ To encourage the participation of persons with disabilities, the City should include the following language in all its public meeting notices published in the Telegram, through the newsletter, and on the website.

“The City of River Rouge will make reasonable accommodations and services necessary for sensory-impaired and disabled citizens at public meetings. Additionally, translation services may be offered upon request and availability. Persons requiring such accommodations /services should contact the City at least five working days in advance of the meeting. Persons requiring information in alternative formats should contact the Community Development Office. The City will conduct all public meetings in locations that are handicapped-accessible, when available. If requested, the City will mail copies of public meeting notices to persons who are homebound and request such accommodation no less than seven days prior to the public meeting.”

Persons Living with Financial Insecurity

Because 45.7% of River Rouge lives below the poverty line,¹⁹ the City should take special care to adopt policies and strategies that accommodate financial insecurity. The City should administer the suggested public participation strategies to best garner input from those living in poverty. The city should follow the incentive programs suggested in §6.4 that were set with socio-economic context in mind.

Persons Without a Reliable Internet Connection

Reliable internet and cellphone service is a challenge for River Rouge residents. Only about 67% of River Rouge residents have any kind of internet subscriptions including broadband, satellite, and/or cellular data plans. This barrier is related to financial insecurity as 46% of households making less than \$20,000 per year and 24% of households making \$20,000 to \$75,000 per year do not have an internet subscription.²⁰ For any outreach or engagement campaign, the City should make sure to utilize both online and offline strategies for delivery of important information.

3.3 Asset Audit

The ABCD approach includes mapping River Rouge's current assets to reflect on the community strengths and how to use them to enhance **public participation**. The following list is initial but incomplete list of assets that staff can prioritize in the public participation process.

3.3.1 Individuals

The people of River Rouge are one of its strongest assets. The community is small; it is only 7,000 people. Most residents lived their entire lives in the city. The Campbell, Eady and Bowdler clans have invested in community development. Some of the individuals and their influence are illustrated below:

- **Patricia Campbell:** Pro-tem Mayor. Campbell was formerly employed with the Michigan State Housing Development Authority. She also served on the SEMCOG Executive Committee. Campbell can connect River Rouge with state, regional and county authorities and advocate for capacity and funding with higher systems of government.
- **Bridgette Bowdler:** Deputy Clerk. Bowdler and her husband also run a non-profit organization, No Kids Without a Christmas. Her public service efforts are recognized by state and regional leaders, and she is well connected with Detroit and other Downriver nonprofits, foundations, chambers of commerce and state senators and representatives.
- **Mitch Doig:** Volunteer Ambassador for the Wayne County Treasurer. Mitch proactively posts announcements of events, local businesses and city issues on his personal Facebook page to 3k+ followers. He also posts historic and current events photographs on the River Rouge Photographs Facebook group. This group has 2.9K members.
- **Gina Wilson Steward:** Editor in chief of the Telegram newspaper. Telegram serves 11 communities, namely: Southwest Detroit, Melvindale, River Rouge, Ecorse, Wyandotte, Lincoln Park, Allen Park, Taylor, Romulus, Westland and Wayne. Steward lives in River Rouge and has a close connection with the city.

3.3.2 Associations

River Rouge has several associations and groups, including:

- **Senior Citizens Group:** Led by former city staffer Olive Roberts, the senior citizens of Rouge are active and currently the most engaged with city activities.
- **Parent Teacher Associations:** The River Rouge school board has a reasonably active PTO. One challenge is that many of the pupils come from the surrounding communities of Lincoln Park, Ecorse, Melvindale and Delray.
- **River Rouge High School Alumni Association:** Because of the high school's stellar sporting pedigree and Michigan's School of Choice policy, many influential Michiganders graduated from the high school and continue to engage with the school and the city through the extensive alumni network.
- **Steelworkers Local 1299:** The branch of the US steel union that has members from Southwest, Delray and River Rouge. In the past the union used to engage actively. The departure of US Steel from River Rouge may change this dynamic.²¹



Left: Steelworkers Local 1299 demonstrate outside City Hall.

Right: City Clean-Up Volunteers move new flowers to get planted.

Photos: City of River Rouge

3.3.3 Religious and Cultural Institutions

Many River Rouge residents align themselves with a variety of cultural and religious traditions. The institutions supporting these traditions are an asset to the City, including:

- **True Worship Church:** Pastor Lovell Cannon serves as the City Chaplain and often helps staff in community outreach.²²
- **Boxing Club:** The River Rouge boxing club has a rich history and is still active today, (although it does not have a place to practice). During visioning for the Master Plan in 2017, almost 76% of respondents supported converting the vacant post office into a community boxing center.²³ Mike Bowdler, president of the Boxing Club purchased the post office in 2021.²⁴

3.3.4 Local Landmarks

River Rouge has several important spaces that have recreational, educational and cultural connections to residents, including:

- **Belanger Park:** The city's only public space with access to the Detroit River, Belanger Park is a boating and fishing spot for citizens. It contains a lighthouse that attracts enthusiasts from around South East Michigan. Unfortunately, accessing this park involves driving through large inactive industrial area.
- **Memorial Park:** Formerly known as LaRouge Park, Memorial Park is the largest public space in River Rouge and the site for most of the "Rouge Days" programming. Located on Jefferson Ave, the park is at the geographic center of the city.
- **Tot Lots:** The city used revenue from new local businesses to finance several playgrounds across residential neighborhoods in the city, including the centrally located Walter White playground.
- **Public Library:** The Library hosts ten computers with an internet connection as well as frequent youth and adult programs. Located a block north of Jefferson road, it attracts community foot-traffic and activity.
- **Daniel D Riney Hall (rec center):** The location of an ice rink and the boxing club, this 50,000 square-foot structure was demolished by US Steel in 2021. The land is currently being cleaned up.

3.3.5 Finances and Exchange

River Rouge is successful in creating an environment where citizens can support one another financially to promote economic development, some of the assets that benefit the City are:

- **Grant Candidacy:** Because of its historical value and its recent shrinking economy, the City qualifies for many state of Michigan and US Federal grants. River Rouge is often touted as a pilot community for incentives to check economic decline and was successful in applying for many grants in the past. One of the major drawbacks to the grant-based approach is that the city currently lacks the capacity to apply for grants and later to administer them.
- **Resource Information Center for the Helpless (RICH) -** A 501(C)3 non-profit organization, set up by Donna Eady of Eady's Clothing Store, RICH organizes clothing and drives to supply underprivileged people with essentials and also helps local businesses with identifying seed funds to start up.

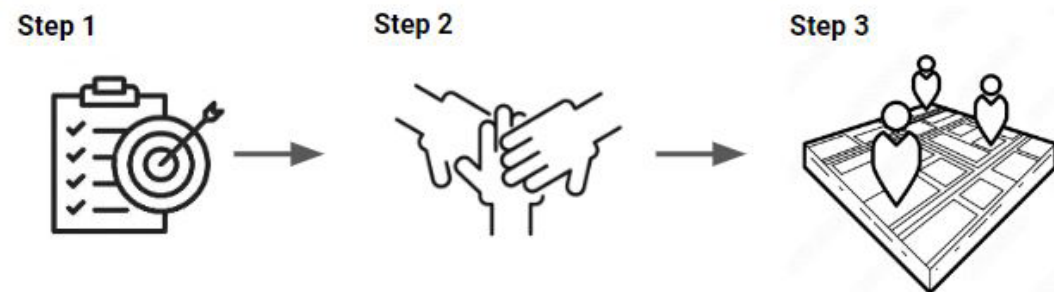
3.4 Capacity Audit

Presently, the City's planning and community engagement is restricted to one permanent staffer – the community development director – who also handles all the City boards and commissions, grant applications, budgeting and public relations. The amount of responsibility held by one person severely limits the city's public participation and planning efforts. **River Rouge needs separate staff for public engagement, economic and community development, grant writing and administration, and communications**, even if these positions are provided through part-time internships or some other creative strategy.

Another development hurdle is the needs-based approach to community and economic development set forth presently by the City. A needs-based approach is reactive, instead of proactive and obstructs long-term planning and consensus building. We recommend that **the City should explore asset-oriented methodology in all future planning projects**, beyond public participation.

3.5 Guide to Asset Mapping

Asset mapping brings community members together to generate a shared awareness and understanding. This establishes an asset-based foundation to community involvement in research, decision-making, and action. In this plan, we identified the list of key stakeholders and assets in Section 4. The City should continue to identify assets depending on the nature of engagement/project planned, and then inventory and map these community strengths and resources. A three-step asset-mapping process is illustrated below:



Step 1: Identify goals and kind of assets

Set goals for asset mapping by linking the purpose of the project with the kind of assets you want to identify. Identify any specific skills or assets needed to address the issue on which you are focusing. These may include **physical assets** (buildings), **knowledge and skills**, **political connections**, **community respect**, **economic resources** (money), and **public audience** (such as the media and clergy). It's important to start a community dialogue by identifying the strengths and assets already at the table.²⁵

Step 2: Identify Partners

Find people and organizations that **share your interests**. Involve partners that have diverse community networks and **knowledge** about the neighborhood (its resources, residents and problems). Involve key people with a **stake in the issue** at hand. If possible, involve enough people to holistically complete the asset map.

Step 3: Make an inventory or map

Sit down with identified partners and take inventory of all the groups (associations, organizations, and institutions) in the community. Refer to other sources of information for the inventory such as: neighborhood/city directories, neighborhood businesses, local newspapers, bulletin boards, and local parks and community centers (for informal groups). Take an inventory of resourceful individuals as well. Some of these individuals may be part of your identified partners' networks. You can also develop a door-to-door survey to identify individual assets. However, surveying the community in such a way is expensive and time consuming.

Case Example:

You are making program decisions. An asset map can help you identify community assets and concerns. The map results help determine new directions for your program or identify new programs that need to be developed.²⁶ You are trying to raise funds to construct a new "tot lot". An asset map can help you identify community assets and concerns. You can identify people who can negotiate with the donor and bargain for more funding for the setup. You can identify potential users as well as people who can organize activities in the new lot. Bringing these assets on as partners will definitely help you plan for the long-term care of the lot.



River Rouge is currently developing several tot lots around the city and they can be a great project to pilot asset mapping methods. Photo: Project team

04

Analysis

Methods

Results



Analysis

To make feasible and helpful recommendations for public participation in River Rouge, we conducted interviews with city officials and surveys with the general public to gather data on current participation strategies and rates.

4.1 Methods

4.1.1 Participants & Data Collection

To learn more about the community of River Rouge and the City's current public engagement strategies, we conducted two informational interviews with key City officials. We interviewed Patty Campbell, City Commissioner,²⁷ and Bridgette Bowlder, Deputy City Clerk.²⁸ We reached out directly to Patty and Bridgette to request a virtual interview with them. We took extensive notes during both interviews, and we received permission from Bridgette to record her interview. We analyzed the notes for common themes and patterns to inform our recommendations.

To learn more about current levels of resident engagement, we prepared a short survey for the public of River Rouge. Participants were asked to provide some demographic information, identify how they currently receive information about events in River Rouge, and suggest potential alternative avenues of communication (see Appendix A2 for the full list of survey questions). Since access to reliable internet and cell service is a challenge in River Rouge, we placed physical surveys and collection boxes at the River Rouge Senior Center, City Clerk's office, Public Housing and the River Rouge Public Library.

4.1.2 Data Analysis

Qualitative data from the informational interviews and surveys were analyzed using thematic analysis. Quantitative data from the surveys were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

4.2 Results

4.2.1 Thematic Analysis of Informational Interviews

In the informational interviews, we identified seven common themes. Below are the themes and relevant information given by one or both of our interviewees.

- **Points of Community Pride:** the diversity of the people in River Rouge
- **High Engagement Activities/Events/Organizations:** the No Kids Without a Christmas annual event, senior citizen events, and when people have a problem or need to complain about a specific issue
- **Low Engagement Activities/Events:** City Council meetings (especially after elections)
- **Where & How to Engage and Inform Residents:** the local cable station and the Mayor's newsletter
- **Challenges and Barriers to Engagement:** lack of broadband internet access
- **Successful Engagement Strategies:** engage different groups with a unique personalized appeal, but in a way that emphasizes the common good of all River Rouge residents
- **Specific Community Groups in Need of More Targeted Engagement:** young people (from youth to young adults/parents)

4.2.2 Descriptive Statistics of Survey Results

We received responses from a fairly diverse demographic of residents. Respondents were between less than 20 and 80+ years old, with the largest percentage being in their 60s (see Figure 4A in Appendix A3 for more details). Our respondents were 61% men and 39% women. 31 years was the median amount of time that the respondents had lived in River Rouge, with answers ranging from 1 to 87.5 years. In person communication/word of mouth (74%) was the most common way respondents get information about River Rouge happenings.

Where do you get information about what is happening in River Rouge?

23 responses

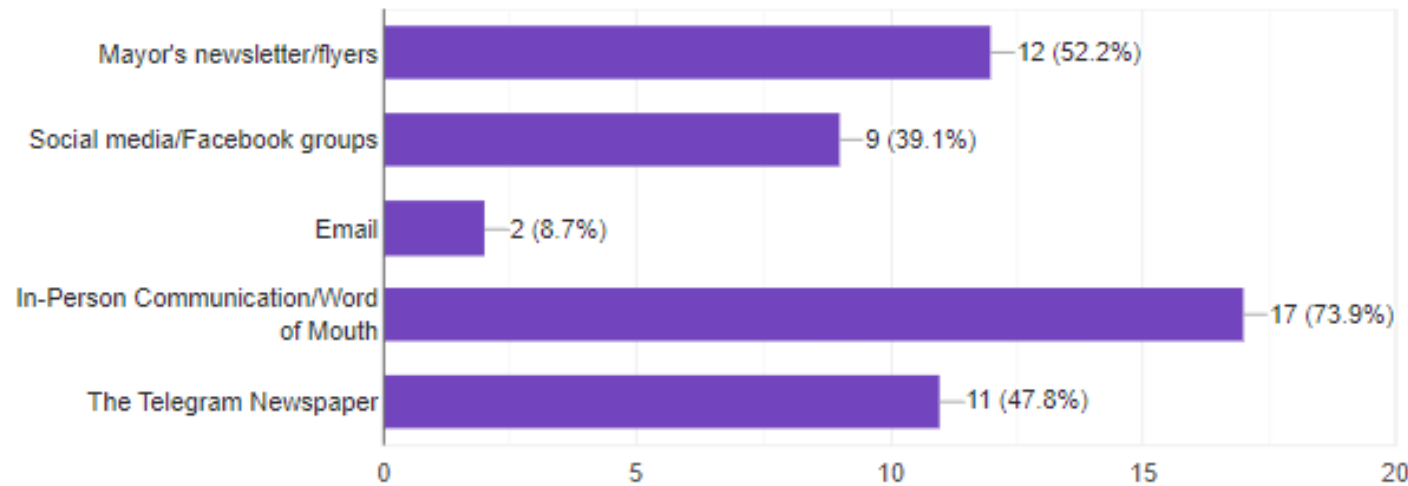


Fig 1: Where residents receive information about events and happenings in River Rouge

The Mayor's newsletters/flyers, the Telegram newspaper, and social media/Facebook groups were also important platforms for information sharing (for more information see Figure 1). Most respondents (75%) said that they participate in City meetings only when there is an issue on the agenda that they care about (for more information see Figure 2). A majority (62%) of respondents did not remember the last time they attended a City meeting or completed a City survey (for more information see Figure 5A in Appendix A3). 56% of respondents answered the long answer question about their motives for participation and what issues in River Rouge are important to them (for more information see Section 5.2.3 below). 56% of respondents expressed a preference for the City to share information and events via a paper announcement at the library or community center (for more information see Figure 3). Overall, 87% of respondents were 60% - 100% confident that the City can make decisions that reflect their values (for more information see Figure 6A in Appendix A3).

4.2.3 Thematic Analysis of Survey Results

When asked what issue(s) motivated their most recent participation in a City meeting, resident responses fell into four main themes:

- **Community Safety:** crime, school safety, policing issues, justice/civil rights.
- **Educational Opportunities:** library functioning, an apprenticeship program.
- **Community Events & News:** community projects, general information gathering.
- **Administration:** elections, tax issues.

How often do you participate in City meetings (city council meetings, planning commission meetings, DDA, surveys, etc.)?

20 responses

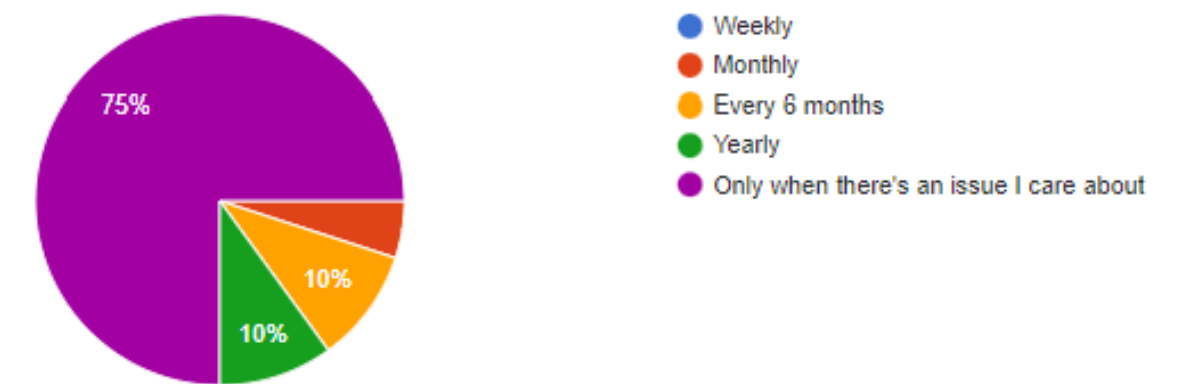


Fig 2: How often River Rouge residents currently participate in City meetings

What is the best way for the City to reach you with events and information?

23 responses

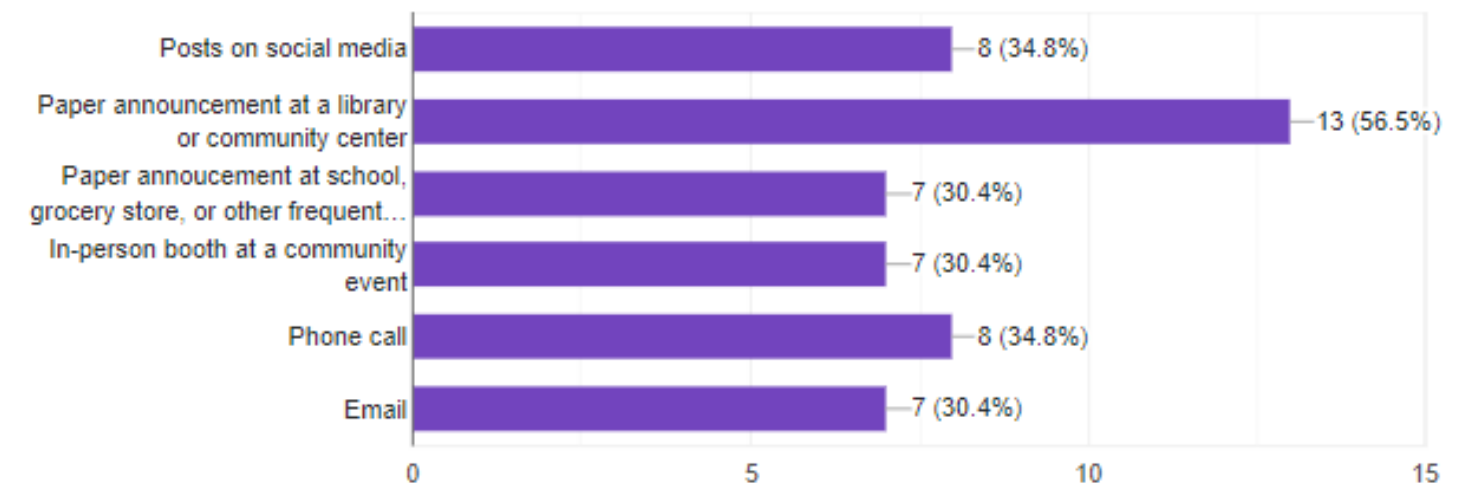


Fig 3: How River Rouge residents would like to receive information about City events

05

Campaign Template

- Master Plans
- Zoning Code Amendments
- Public Infrastructure
- Downtown Development
- Private Development with Substantial Impact



Scenario-Specific Campaign Template

The following list is meant to be a flexible starting point for when opportunities for public participation arise.

5.1 Master/Land Use Plans

Master plans require significant outreach and long-term long term engagement as they involve the most stakeholders of any event. Master plans are subject to state regulations on engagement. The City will adhere to the regulations in the Michigan Open Meetings Act and Planning Enabling Act, outlined in Section 3 of this plan.

Outreach	Engagement	Stakeholders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Printed Information Material • Bill Stuffer • Advertisements • Social Media • Website 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surveys • Open Staff Engagement Hours • Oral History Events • Public Hearings • Visioning Activities • Engagement Games • Advisory Committees • Design Charrettes • Task Forces 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Businesses • Religious Organizations • Community Organizations • City-Based Public Entities • Adjacent Cities • Wayne County • SEMCOG

5.2 Zoning Code Amendment

Zoning code amendments may influence various stakeholders. Zoning code amendments are subject to state regulations on engagement. The City will adhere to the regulations in the Michigan Open Meetings Act and Zoning Enabling Act outlined in Section 3 of this plan.

Outreach	Engagement	Stakeholders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Printed Information Material • Bill Stuffer • Social Media • Website 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surveys • Coffee Chats • Open Staff Engagement Hours • Public Hearings • Visioning Activities • Citizen Led Tours 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Businesses • Religious Organizations • City-Based Public Entities • Adjacent Cities • Wayne County

5.3 Infrastructure/Public Development Projects

Infrastructure/public development projects are often large projects that are both necessary and involve various community stakeholders. These projects should utilize multiple engagement points before and during construction.

Outreach	Engagement	Stakeholders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Printed Information Material Outreach at Community Institutions Bill Stuffer Advertisements Social Media Website 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community Ambassadors Citizen Led Tours Task Forces 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Businesses Community Organizations City-Based Public Entities Adjacent Cities

5.4 Downtown Development Association (DDA) Projects

DDA projects are crucial to building a thriving West Jefferson corridor that connects River Rouge to neighboring municipalities. These projects should utilize multiple participation strategies throughout the development process.

Outreach	Engagement	Stakeholders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Printed Information Material Advertisements Social Media Website 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Surveys Citizen Led Tours Oral History Events Open Houses Citizen Led Tours Citizen Juries Charettes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Businesses City-Based Public Entities Adjacent Cities

5.5 Private Development Projects with Substantial Impact

Private development projects with substantial community impact should be treated with heightened outreach and engagement emphasis.

Outreach	Engagement	Stakeholders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Printed Information Material Advertisements Social Media Website 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Open Staff Engagement Hours Community Ambassadors Citizen Juries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Businesses City-Based Public Entities



River Rouge Commissioner Dan Cooney is well-known in the area for his campaign to “fix the damn bridge.” A great example of participatory action by River Rouge, Ecorse and South-west Detroit.

Photo: Dan Cooney, via facebook

06

Participation Toolbox

Outreach Strategies

Engagement Techniques

Incentives












Public Participation Toolbox

This section identifies strategies and techniques that the city can use to identify outreach strategies and engagement techniques. **Outreach strategies** are best practices for the **city to reach people** and inform them about planning and development processes. **Engagement techniques** focus on the **people-to-city** pathways for participation. The Public Participation Toolbox offers public participation techniques that can be applied in River Rouge. It is not an exhaustive list of every possible technique. We have evaluated each strategy for its use of resources (financial, staffing, and time) as well as its level of engagement. This evaluation is conveyed through icons which are explained below:

Resources Required

Less More

 Low financial resources required	 Some financial resources required	 Intensive financial resources or ongoing financial resources required
 Mostly hands-off for staff after initial set-up	 Staff management and guidance required	 Requires high level of staff involvement and multiple staff members
 Short-term; minimal time	 Time required for participants and staff	 Lots of time or ongoing commitment for staff and/or participants

Levels of Engagement

Less More

			
Inform	Consult	Involve	Co-govern

6.1 Outreach Strategies

Community engagement should provide people with objective and holistic information about the City's current and future developments. The following asset-based outreach strategies outline how the City can use community resources to share information.

We have pulled together relevant outreach techniques from other planning literature and the IAP2 toolbox. The following section lists out key assets that can be useful to spread information:



1. Printed Information Material

These materials are important to inform people about the date, time and place of an upcoming public meeting, such as Master Plan updates or any community meeting.

Best practices:

- o Keep it short and visually appealing.
- o Include a postage-paid comment form to encourage two-way communication and to expand the mailing list.

Suggested Methods: Mayor's Newsletter, Posters, Fact sheets, Brochures.

Resources and Partners: City Clerk, Public Library, associations like Senior Citizen Group and PTO or convenience stores such as the Bi-rite Supermarket and Family Dollar.



2. Bill Stuffer

Information embedded as a footer in the monthly utility bill or as a separate flyer with the bill. This could create an economical use of existing mailings and provide widespread distribution within the service area.

Best practices:

- o Design bill stuffers to be eye-catching to encourage readership.

Suggested Methods: Surveys, Fact sheets, Polling.

Resources and Partners: DTE



3. Outreach at Community Institutions

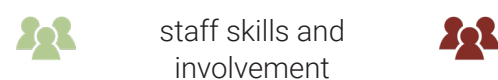
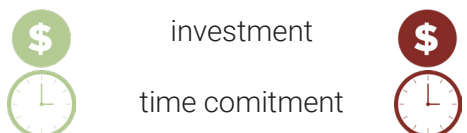
Religious and cultural institutions are important actors for spreading the word to people at the church or public events.

Best practices:

- o Ask event organizers to speak out a short message at the beginning of the ceremony.
- o Distribute flyers at the entrance.

Suggested Methods: Verbal announcements, paper flyers.

Resources and Partners: Individuals, associations, institutions, community groups



4. Information Distribution and Collection Centers

Make information available at public spaces that River Rouge residents frequent. This makes information accessible to the public without going to the City Hall. For the City, this helps reduce the costs or complications of tracking multiple copies sent to different people.

Best practices:

- o Designate fixed spots which become information booths.
- o Hire staff at these centers temporarily to become support assistants during large-scale information distribution drives.

Suggested Methods: Fact sheets, posters of announcements.

Resources and Partners: Public Library, public housing, local institutions, convenience/grocery stores



5. Advertisements

A paid advertisement in newspapers or magazines can be used to reach a broader audience. If certain projects require support of residents outside River Rouge, then a wider distribution of information can help create the necessary external support.

Best practices:

- o Keep the advertisements short and visually appealing.
- o Figure out the best days and best sections of the paper to reach the intended audience.

Suggested Methods: Telegram newspaper, any regional newspaper widely distributed.

Resources and Partners: Telegram, regional newspaper centres.



6. Social Media

The use of social media to circulate short, graphical information regarding public meetings or survey links was highly recommended by residents in the survey. Even though internet access is problematic in some parts of River Rouge, for people with access, this is a good source for outreach.

Best practices:

- o Keep the posts short and visually appealing.
- o Tag important people involved so that people know who to contact if needed.

Suggested Methods: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter

Resources and Partners: Mitch Doig, City Clerk



7. Website

The City of River Rouge's website is a great source of information related to events, meetings and programs. The website could feature a citizen of the month or provide other incentives for people to check regularly.

Best practices:

- o A good home page is critical
- o Put critical information at the top of page

Suggested Methods: An updated city website

Resources and Partners: City of River Rouge staff

6.2 Engagement Strategies

Engagement strategies focus on ways in which the city can compile input and provide feedback as well as bring the community together. A variety of techniques should be used to engage a wide and diverse group of residents in all major decisions and projects.

6.2.1 Short Term Resident Engagement

1. Surveys

Mailed and Distributed Paper Surveys



Paper surveys sent through the mail or distributed at key locations

Best Practices:

- o Use only a few questions as possible
- o Keep questions simple
- o Use multiple choice and scaled questions as opposed to open-ended questions
- o Provide space for elaboration and comments
- o Drop off paper surveys at key locations in addition to mailed surveys

Location: Library, City Hall offices, Senior Center, Individual homes, Churches

Resources and Partners: library staff, mayor's office (newsletter), seniors, city clerk

In-Person and Telephone Surveys



Residents surveyed in person at key locations and over the phone

Best Practices:

- o Use only few questions as possible
- o Keep questions simple
- o Use multiple choice and scaled questions over open-ended questions

Location: Library, city hall offices, community centers, and parks

Resources and Partners: Social groups, churches, community ambassadors

2. Coffee Chats



Small meetings within a neighborhood, often at a person's home

Best Practices:

- o Come with prepared questions and a few backup prompts
- o Allow for silence and pauses in conversations
- o Try and moderate participation to ensure everyone is heard

Location: Resident homes, neighborhood blocks and parks during fair weather

Resources and Partners: Public housing director, PTOs, churches, city council members, Mayor's (newsletter)

3. Open Staff Engagement Hours



At City Hall

Year round regular engagement hours where residents can ask questions and learn about ongoing projects

Best Practices:

- o Establish easy to remember regular times
- o Provide a variety of times so more community members can attend
- o Provide adequate notice and send reminders of upcoming sessions

Location: City Hall

Resources and Partners: community ambassadors, city clerk, Mayor's newsletter, Telegram newspaper

At Public Events



Staff a table at well attended public events to answer questions, inform about ongoing projects, and solicit feedback on future decisions.

Best Practices:

- o Provide adequate notice
- o Have visible incentives for engagement
- o Arrive with informational handouts about ongoing projects and initiatives

Location: High-attendance events (Rouge Days, High School Football, etc.)

Resources and Partners: event organizers, Mitch Doig, local celebrities, Mayor's newsletter, Telegram newspaper, DDA

4. Oral History Events



Host events that collect oral history, and encourage events between elders in the community and younger community members

Best Practices:

- o Make an effort to attract senior citizens from outside of city government
- o Engage a variety of "younger" community members
- o Provide questions with similar themes to current projects and plans

Location: Senior center, parks, public schools, and walking tours

Resources and Partners: Senior center staff, PTOs, school staff, senior groups, business owners, Mayor's newsletter, DDA, local non-profits



investment



time comitment



staff skills and involvement





Left: Two River Rouge residents pose for a photo at a public meeting.



Right: Commissioner Pierce speaks at a public hearing

Photos: Mitch Doig

5. Public Hearings



Formal meetings with scheduled presentations (Not recommended unless required; very top-down approach)

Best Practices:

- o Provide adequate notice and agenda
- o Arrive with informational handouts about ongoing projects and initiatives
- o Schedule to best serve public attendance if possible

Location: City Hall

Resources and Partners: Staff, mayor's office (newsletter), the Telegram newspaper

6. Open Houses



An open house to allow the public to visit different information and engagement stations at their own pace. The facility should be set up with several stations, each addressing a separate issue. Volunteers guide participants through the exhibits.

Best Practices:

- o Provide adequate notice of date, time, and station topics
- o Have plenty of staff and volunteers available
- o Encourage different community groups to attend

Location: City Hall

Resources and Partners: Staff, community ambassadors, senior center, Mitch Doig, mayor's office (newsletter), the Telegram newspaper

7. Visioning Activities



Host ongoing visioning activities like participatory mapping, idea walls or community art

Best Practices:

- o Make public art and maps large and legible
- o Provide multiple methods for adding comments to maps (stickers, sticky notes, comment box)
- o For public art, provide materials that are easy to use
- o Keep prompts simple

Location: City Hall, community centers, library, public parks

Resources and Partners: Local artists, afterschool/community programs, community ambassadors, churches, PTOs, event organizers, public housing staff, mayor's office (newsletter), DDA, local non-profits

8. Engagement Games



Staff lead board or drawing games based on general visioning or a certain city initiative. Games are not just an engaging activity, but also help stakeholders understand others perspectives.

Best Practices:

- o Keep the games simple
- o Provide written instructions in addition to staff assistance
- o Shorter game-play allows for a greater number of participants
- o Longer game-play allows for more in depth engagement

Location: City Hall, public events, and community centers

Resources and Partners: local celebrities, city staff, PTOs, community ambassadors, community center/ after-school programs, event organizers, public housing staff, mayor's office (newsletter), DDA, local non-profits

6.2.2 Long Term Resident Engagement



1. Community Ambassadors

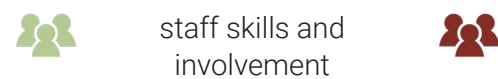
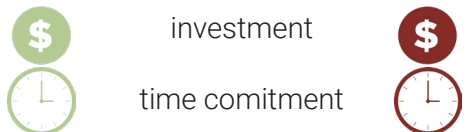
Qualified individuals volunteer to conduct project outreach and encourage public participation; Ambassadors report back to city staff

Best Practices:

- Choose residents with a variety of backgrounds
- Don't rely solely on a single ambassador's feedback

Location: Ambassadors are dispersed throughout the community and report back to City officials

Resources and Partners: senior center staff, churches, local business owners, event organizers, PTOs, public housing staff, Wayne County staff, local non-profits, mayor's office (newsletter)





2. Citizen Led Tours

Provide resident-led walking tours for key stakeholders, elected officials, advisory group members and the media.

Best Practices:

- o Work with residents to develop a guide/loose script before the tour
- o Choose residents that reflect diverse backgrounds
- o Staff shadow when capacity allows

Fig 5: A crowd gathers before River Rouge's annual city clean up

Location: Start with brief meeting in City Hall or community space then tour relevant areas of the city
Resources and Partners: Community ambassadors, senior center staff, PTOs, local business owners, city clerk, churches, local non-profits, mayor's office (newsletter)



3. Advisory Committees

A group of representative stakeholders assembled to provide public input to the planning process, especially to stakeholders outside of the local community; Can be volunteer-based

Best Practices:

- o Include as many relevant stakeholders as possible
- o Selectively recruit members from historically underrepresented groups and balance the composition of the committee carefully
- o Encourage non-officials to lead discussions and form agendas

Location: City Hall, community centers, external stakeholder offices
Resources and Partners: senior center staff, churches, local business owners, event organizers, PTOs, public housing staff, SEMCOG, DDA, local non-profits, mayor's office (newsletter), the Telegram newspaper



4. Design Charrettes

Intensive session where participants re-design public spaces; Should be used when facilitators are available-should be pulled from professional stakeholders. If there is resource capacity, these events can be expanded to become educational workshops offering presentations and exhibits before the design sessions.

Best Practices:

- o Include many relevant stakeholders
- o Arrange for skilled facilitators to keep the discussion moving forward
- o Provide adequate notice and background information to participants
- o Space the charette over several days, with informational and deliberative sessions.
- o Distribute take-home materials for continued visioning

Location: Community spaces, library, City Hall
Resources and Partners: Community center, library staff, DDA, SEMCOG, city clerk, local non-profits, Mitch Doig, mayor's office (newsletter), the Telegram newspaper



Left: City Staff welcome folks to City Hall with tote bags; Center: A citizens gather for the annual cleanup Right: Residents lead an engagement activity at the school district's Black History event. Photos: Mitch Doig



5. Citizen Juries

Small group of citizens assembled to learn about an issue and make a recommendation (non-binding with no legal standing)

Best Practices:

- o Include as many relevant stakeholders as possible
- o Provide adequate notice and background information to participants
- o Prepare graphical material and guides to quickly inform participants

Location: Community spaces, City Hall, external stakeholder offices
Resources and Partners: SEMCOG, local non-profits, senior center staff, city clerk, Mitch Doig, mayor's office (newsletter), the Telegram newspaper



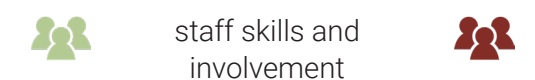
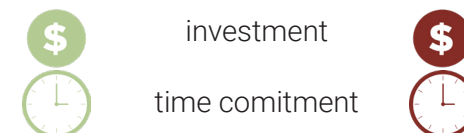
6. Task Forces

A group of experts or stakeholders formed to develop a specific product or policy recommendation

Best Practices:

- o Include as many relevant stakeholders as possible
- o Encourage non-officials to lead discussions and form agendas

Location: Public/Private Committees, Appointment/Paid
Resources and Partners: Community center, library staff, DDA, SEMCOG, city clerk, newsletter, local non-profits, Mitch Doig, mayor's office (newsletter), the Telegram newspaper



6.3 Incentives

Incentives can be an important way to boost the participation of the above strategies. Different types of incentives should be considered for short-term engagement strategies and long-term engagement strategies.

6.3.1 Short Term Engagements

Short term engagements include those strategies listed in section 6.3.1. They are aimed at quick, spontaneous, low-investment participation. Incentives must match the scale of such participation.

Gift Cards & Coupons

Participants are entered into a raffle to receive gift cards to encourage participation. The number and size of gift cards can be scaled to match the desired engagement. Coupons can be handed out to participants through partnerships with local businesses.

Suggested Engagements: Surveys, Visioning Activities, Engagement Games

Food & Drink

Refreshments, when announced ahead of time, can be effective in encouraging participation in engagement activities. Consider time of day and likely audience when determining the array of food and drink.

Suggested Engagements: Coffee Chats, Open Staff Engagement Hours, Visioning Activities, Engagement Games.

Live Music

Providing entertainment in the form of live bands or DJ booths can encourage more people to attend public engagement events.

Suggested Engagements: Open Staff Engagement Hours (At Public Events), Engagement Games

Giveaways

Giveaways can include City-themed merchandise such as tote bags, pens, and hats. Local businesses can also provide merchandise as a marketing opportunity.

Suggested Engagements: Oral History Events, Public Hearings, Open Houses

Photo Opportunities

Providing opportunities to pose on-site for pictures with engaging characters and/or fun backdrops can further encourage participation.

Suggested Engagements: Open Staff Engagement Hours (At Public Events)



Left: The grill is fired up to serve hot dogs to City Clean Up volunteers;
Center: Celebrating after finishing a set at the senior center.

Right: At the senior valentines event
Photos: Mitch Doig

6.3.2 Long-Term Engagements

Long-term engagements require more investment from participants. Therefore, incentives must be structured to make the larger time investment worthwhile for participants. Below are the suggested incentives for long-term engagements.

Stipends

Similar to gift cards, stipends are monetary incentives for public participation. However, stipends are generally larger amounts of money over a longer period of engagement.

Suggested Engagements: Advisory Committees, Citizen Juries, Task Forces

Childcare

Providing a place where parents/guardians can leave their children during engagement activities allows for more people to participate. This incentive requires staffing and resources to keep the children safe, occupied, and within parent view. Childcare services also apply to long term engagements in which residents may be participating on a more regular basis.

Suggested Engagements: Advisory Committees, Design Charettes, Citizen Juries, Task Forces

Food & Drink

Repeated long-run engagement activities should also consider providing some form of refreshments for participants.

Suggested Engagements: Citizen Led Tours, Advisory Committees, Design Charettes, Citizen Juries, Task Forces

Advertising & Publicity

Long term engagement strategies can offer opportunities for businesses to advertise and gain publicity.

Suggested Engagements: Citizen Led Tours, Community Ambassadors, Advisory Committees

06

Follow-up

Communicating Results

Evaluating Engagement



Communicating Results

River Rouge is committed to keeping the community informed as the city proceeds with planning and public participation. Strategies in the previous section will encourage additional feedback and input into the city planning process. In turn, the City understands the need to increase transparency around participation processes. The City will compile results from every public engagement activity into a clear, user-friendly document that is available to the public, either through publication (online or in print) or by request (for small projects that do not have wide effects on the community). The following table summarizes the methods that River Rouge plans to use future to communicate public feedback from engagement in the future:

	<p>The agendas and minutes of all city council and commission meetings will be posted on the City website within a week of approval. A hard copy of the minutes will be available at the City Clerk's office.</p>
<p>Inform</p>	
	<p>All participants in the consultative methods will receive a copy of their responses. The City will share the final conclusions of the consultations with participants digitally, if they request it.</p>
<p>Consult</p>	
	<p>Summaries of involvement events will be compiled into simple clear documents, and if possible, process videos. These will be uploaded to the city website and in the City Clerk's office within two weeks. Participants may suggest corrections to summary documents. Other residents may also contribute their views in response to the compilation; within a month of publishing.</p>
<p>Involve</p>	
	<p>Participants will collaborate with city staff and facilitators to jointly develop action plans based on the engagement. The plan will be posted on the City website and presented at a public hearing. Other residents may also send in their views by calling in or writing to the City Clerk, and the plan may be amended to incorporate certain feedback.</p>
<p>Co-Govern</p>	

Evaluating Engagement

All public participation efforts will be recorded by the City's departments and reviewed on a routine basis. The City will analyze public participation for each project separately. River Rouge understands that turnout and response metrics may not be the best way to evaluate engagement. Additional evaluation techniques include:

Review and compare similar projects:

- o Metrics should only be compared across plans/projects of a similar nature.
- o *IE: Engagement on Master Plan (2016) vs Master Plan Update (2021)*

Weigh unifying engagement greater than high turnout engagement:

- o Demographic variety of responses and in-person engagements over simple measures.
- o *IE: Community meeting with diverse stakeholders vs. Senior center survey*

Develop and reference participation-rate goals for under-reached groups:

- o The City will work to identify groups that have historically participated at low rates and intentionally monitor improvement of these rates across all projects
- o *IE: Is city engagement with young parents improving?*

The City of River Rouge will review this Public Participation Plan at least **every five years** to evaluate the effectiveness of the procedures outlined in this document. After evaluating the Public Participation Plan, the City will revise its Public Participation Toolbox to incorporate new and more effective ways to involve the public in its planning and decision-making process.

Endnotes

- 1 Michael Bowdler, Mike Bowdler's seventeen years as River Rouge Mayor, interview by Brooke Troxell et al., February 7, 2023.
- 2 "River Rouge Master Plan" (River Rouge Planning Commission, 2017), <https://drive.google.com/drive/u/1/folders/1WqCNICASFH1Mq8Rklw04anBqCM-ybdRz>
- 3 Property Tax Estimator," Michigan Department of Treasury, August 2022, <https://treas-secure.state.mi.us/ptestimator/PTEstimator.asp>.
- 4 "River Rouge Master Plan" (2017)
- 5 "River Rouge Master Plan" (2017)
- 6 Hanna Nel, "A Comparison between the Asset-Oriented and Needs-Based Community Development Approaches in Terms of Systems Changes," Practice 30, no. 1 (2017): 33–52

Project Team



Brooke Troxell (*she/her*) is currently a dual degree Master's student studying Urban and Regional Planning and Environmental Justice at the University of Michigan. Brooke is originally from Spartanburg, SC and spent several years in Oklahoma City, before moving to Ann Arbor, for graduate school. She has a Bachelor's of Science in biology with neuroscience and women and gender studies minors. Brooke has seven years of informal science education experience: writing, budgeting for, and delivering dynamic educational programs for large and small groups of all ages at science centers, museums, and zoos. She is interested in reparative planning and working to empower communities around issues of climate resiliency, adaptation, and sustainability. Brooke is excited to bring her knowledge and passion for equitable engagement and community empowerment to this project.



Jessica Hobbs (*she/her*) is a Master's student studying Urban and Regional Planning at the University of Michigan. Jessica is originally from Kent, Connecticut and spent most of her life in small-town New England. She received a Bachelor's in History and Sustainability from the University of Michigan. Her work experience includes time with CBRE, a large real estate management firm, and full-time communications and graphic design work at the University of Michigan. She is interested in alternative approaches to economic development and sustainable land-use planning. She will bring her research and writing skills, her experience in team management and organization, and GIS training to this project.



Jinren Yuan (*she/her*) is a Master's student studying Urban and Regional Planning at the University of Michigan. Jinren is originally from Wuxi, China and spent most of her life in South-eastern China. Her undergraduate studies spanned universities in China and the UK. She spent the first two years studying Urban Planning and Design in Xi'an Jiaotong Liverpool University in Suzhou, China. The following two years she studied Environment and Urban Planning in the University of Liverpool in Liverpool, UK. Jinren has work experience in a planning institute in China. She is interested in sustainable planning in transportation, environment, and communities. Jinren will bring her knowledge in planning and a passion for communications and creativity to the team.



Tahir Noronha (*he/him*) is a Master's student studying Urban and Regional Planning at the University of Michigan. Tahir is originally from Goa, India and spent most of his life in his small coastal state. He has a Bachelor's of Architecture and five years of experience working for a local non-profit, advocating for marginalized groups and supporting local government in communications, urban design, and health infrastructure. He worked as an organizer and advocate with an indigenous group in Goa and assisted in two successful state campaigns in the 2022 election. He now advises the newly-elected indigenous legislators. Tahir is interested in public participation in land use and climate adaptation planning. He will bring his experience in organizing and campaigns, and skills in graphic design to this project.



Theodore Shapinsky (*he/him*) is a Master's student studying Urban and Regional Planning at the University of Michigan. Theo is originally from Washington, DC and spent his entire life there before moving to Ann Arbor, MI for college. He obtained his Bachelor's of Arts from the University of Michigan majoring in the environment with a Chinese language and culture minor. Theo brings both a breadth and depth of knowledge from extensive planning-related coursework. He is interested in solving environmental issues through transportation alternatives, such as walking, biking, and transit. Theo is excited to bring his knowledge and passion for environmental and transportation planning to the team.



Vaidehi Shah (*she/her*) is a Master's student studying Urban and Regional Planning at the University of Michigan. She is from Ahmedabad, India but has worked in other cities in India like Bangalore and Delhi. She did her undergraduate studies in Architecture from CEPT University. She has over 3 years of project experience in urban design, research, and community engagement while working with nonprofits and government consultants in India. She is interested in equitable development of cities with a focus on infrastructure planning and climate resiliency. She will bring in her experience of creating engagement strategies of co-organizing a public participation campaign and also her creative skills to the team.

7 Lynne C. Manzo and Douglas D. Perkins, "Finding Common Ground: The Importance of Place Attachment to Community Participation and Planning," *Journal of Planning Literature* 20, no. 4 (2006),

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9 "Public Participation Plan" (Village of Blissfield, 2022).

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13 Donna Eady, "R.I.C.H. Resource Information Center for the Helpless," accessed April 7, 2023, <https://www.richresources.org/>.

14 Rhonda Walker, "Do I Put Gas in the Car to Go to Work? Or Do I Buy Bread and Milk?: Metro Detroit Pantry Helps Feed Thousands," *Click on Detroit*, October 18, 2022, <https://www.clickondetroit.com/news/local/2022/10/18/do-i-put-gas-in-the-car-to-go-to-work-or-do-i-buy-bread-and-milk-how-a-local-pantry-is-helping-feed-thousands-of-metro-detroiters/>.

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16 SEMCOG, "Member Services," South East Michigan Council of Governments, accessed April 7, 2023, <https://semcog.org/member-services>.

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19 US Census Bureau "DP02 5-year" American Community Survey, 2021.

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21 Michael Bowdler interview February 7, 2023.

22 Karl Laub, What does River Rouge need in a Public Participation Plan?, interview by Jessica Hobbs et al., February 3, 2023.

23 "River Rouge Master Plan" (2017) p41

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25 "Step-by-Step Guide to Asset Mapping," Section 1: Asset Mapping (UCLA Center for Health Policy and Research, 2005), https://healthpolicy.ucla.edu/programs/health-data/trainings/Documents/tw_cba20.pdf.

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27 Patricia Campbell, Community Engagement in River Rouge: City Council Perspective, interview by Brooke Troxell et al., February 22, 2023.

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Appendices

A1: Explanation of Section 5 Symbols

Resources Required

Less More

 Low financial resources required	 Some financial resources required	 Intensive financial resources or ongoing financial resources required
 Mostly hands-off for staff after initial set-up	 Staff management and guidance required	 Requires high level of staff involvement and multiple staff members
 Short-term; minimal time	 Time required for participants and staff	 Lots of time or ongoing commitment for staff and/or participants

Levels of Engagement

Less More

			
Inform	Consult	Involve	Co-govern

A2: Survey Questions

COMPLETE THIS SURVEY FOR A CHANCE TO WIN A \$25 VISA GIFT CARD!

We are a group of University of Michigan students who are helping the City of River Rouge collect data on how the City can best engage residents.

1. What is your age? (multiple choice)

- Under 20 years old
- 20s
- 30s
- 40s
- 50s
- 60s
- 70s
- 80+

2. How long have you lived in River Rouge? (short answer text)

3. What is your gender? (multiple choice)

- Man
- Woman
- Other (short answer text)

4. Where do you get information about what is happening in River Rouge? (checkboxes)

- Mayor's newsletter/flyers
- Social media/Facebook groups
- Email
- In-Person Communication/Word of Mouth
- The Telegram Newspaper
- Other (short answer text)

5. How often do you participate in City meetings (city council meetings, planning commission meetings, DDA, surveys, etc.)? (multiple choice)

- Weekly
- Monthly
- Every 6 months
- Yearly
- Only when there's an issues I care about
- Other (short answer text)

6. When was the last time you attended a City meeting or completed a City survey? (multiple choice)

- Within the last week
- Within the last month
- Within the last 6 months
- Within the last year
- Never
- Don't remember
- Other (short answer text)

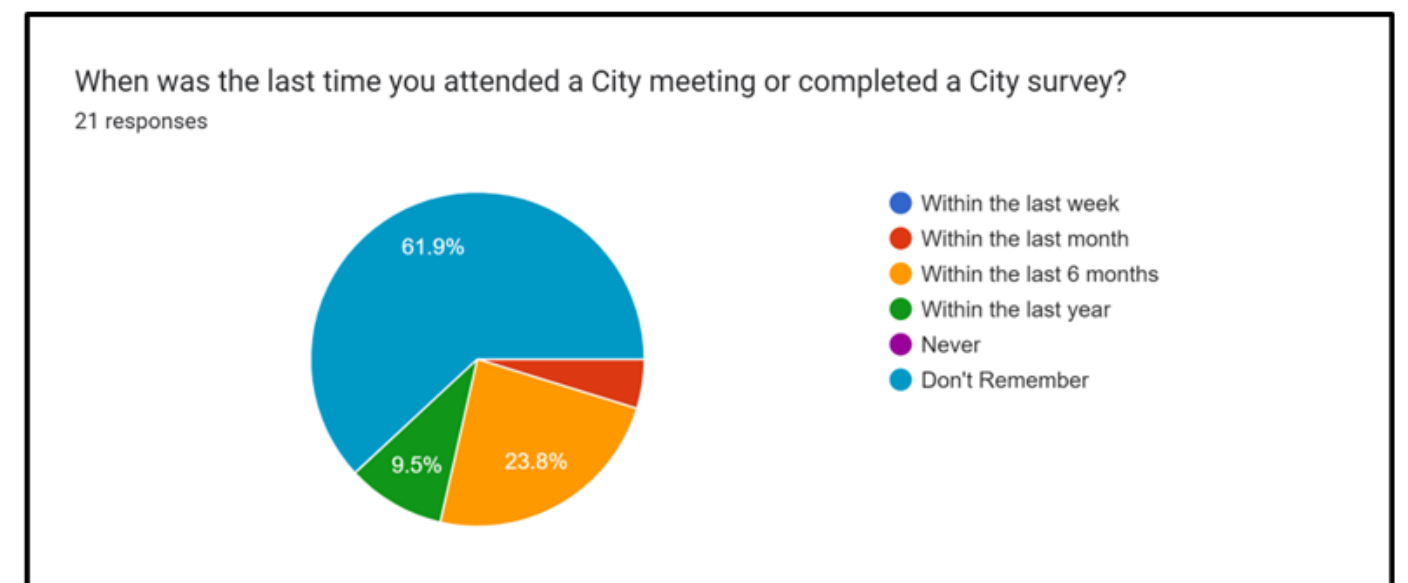
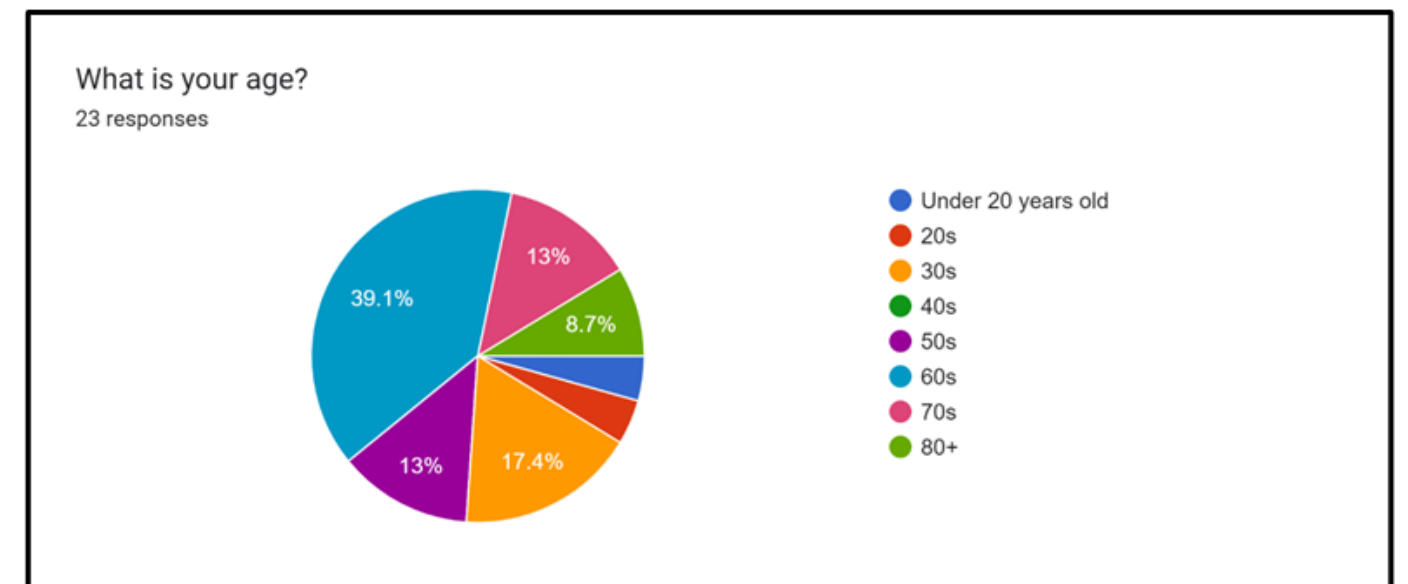
7. Why did you last participate? What issue was important to you? (long answer text)

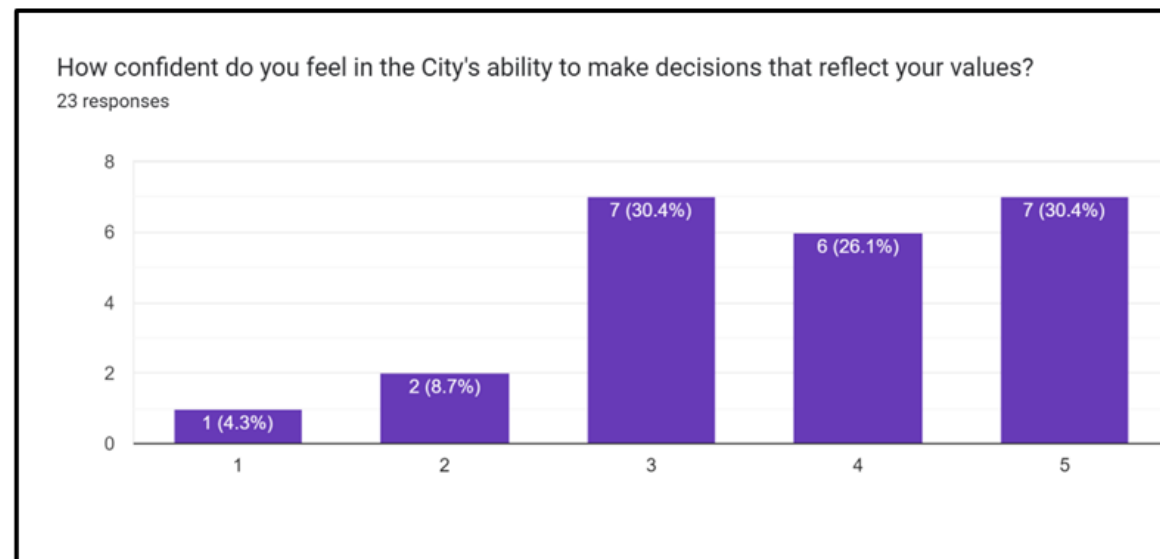
8. What is the best way for the City to reach you with events and information? (check boxes)

- Posts on social media
- Paper announcement at a library or community center
- Paper announcement at a school, grocery store, or other frequented location
- In-person booth at a community event
- Phone call
- Email
- Other (short answer text)

9. How confident do you feel in the City's ability to make decisions that reflect your values? (Likert scale from 1: Not Very Confident to 5: Very Confident)

A3: Additional Survey Results





A4: RRC Checklist

RRC Requirements for Public Participation Plans:

The plan identifies key key stakeholders, including those not normally at the visioning table.

- o Section 4 – Identification of Key Stakeholders and Assets

The plan describes public participation methods and the appropriate venue to use each method.

- o Section 6 – Scenario-Specific Campaign Template
- o Section 7 – Public Participation Toolkit

The plan includes the use of both traditional and proactive engagement methods.

- o Section 7 – Public Participation Toolkit

The plan identifies how the community will report out results of the engagement efforts.

- o Section 8 – Communication Results

The community reviews and updates the plan on a regular basis.

- o Section 9 – Evaluating Engagement

A5: List of Faith Groups in River Rouge

#	Name	Pastor	Address	Phone
1	Fews Memorial	Rev Donte Townsend	456 Palmerston, RR	(313) 382-2811
2	Gordy Memorial COIGC	Elder Grandberry	455 Polk	(313) 388-0670
3	St John's AME	Rev Traylor	505 Beechwood	(313) 386-2288
4	True Worship	Pastor Cannon	1440 Coolidge Hwy	(313) 554-3917
5	River Rouge Bible Assembly	Rev Love	329 Beechwood	(313) 841-8022
6	Encourage Ministries / Lamb of God	Rev Bynum	371 Palmerston	(313) 498-2148
7	Church of God of Prophecy		41 Orchard	(423) 599-5100
8	True Covenant Church		200 Genessee	(313) 493-4662
9	Assembly of Praise		21 Louis, RR	(313) 254-4800
10	Union Second Baptist		459 Beechwood	(313) 383-1558
11	Love Joy Missionary Baptist		332 Polk	(313) 516-2482
12	Church of Christ		402 Holford	(313) 382-7702