

Introduction

A brief summary of the purpose and scope of the BIG Picture comprehensive planning initiative was presented by Dennis Madsen, Manager of Urban and Long Range Planning. It was noted that Mayor Tommy Battle had requested that community outreach be an integral and important part of the effort. Therefore, the specific purpose of this first meeting of the Outreach Focus Group was to address two key questions:

1. Who are we not reaching?
2. What platforms can we use to reach them?

Current Activities and Participation

In a brief summary of recent outreach efforts it was noted that the BIG Picture website had over 4,000 unique visitors and the map app had nearly 900 views since their launch in May. The BIG Picture email newsletter is being received by over 5,000 addresses. In addition, there was broad representation and involvement at the kick-off meeting. However, we want to help ensure that we are not missing input from citizens or communities who are less technically oriented, lack internet access and/or have language barriers.

Recommendations

The following ideas and suggestions for enhancing outreach to various parts of the community were noted:

1. Face-to-face contacts are often the most effective
2. Distribution of flyers door to door and posting of flyers at the Oscar Mason Library
3. Distribution of information to Public Housing Authority Resident Council Presidents
4. Coordination with Second Mile Development in Terry Heights and the similar group in Lincoln Village
5. Distribution of information at various community events planned throughout the summer
6. Placing information in coupon books
7. Distribution of information to local churches through their services, events and bulletins
8. Distribution of information to the local pastoral associations, the interfaith mission and the multi-faith newsletter
9. Distribution of information to the Women's Business Council
10. Distribution of information to Leadership Huntsville
11. Press releases to AL.com and other local media
12. Development of ambassador groups to supplement planning staff and develop community trust
13. Public service announcements in local movie theaters

14. Public service announcements on the local public radio station WLRH
15. Consider sessions or programs hosted by local media in addition to city initiated events that are simply covered by the media
16. Distribution of information at various expos at the Von Braun Center
17. Presentations at local retirement communities
18. Distribution of information at local Farmer's Markets
19. Outreach to various educational institutions from elementary through college to garner interest by young people
20. Involvement of Parent-Teacher groups
21. Distribution of information to neighborhood civic associations and neighborhood watch groups
22. Engage with David Nuttall and his mapping initiative
23. "Moving whiteboards" at various events like Concerts in the Park
24. Speaking engagements at local civic clubs
25. Develop relationships with leaders in minority communities to help staff convey BIG Picture message.

General Comments and Insights

In addition to the specific suggestions noted above, the following questions, insights and thoughts were noted with regard to our outreach efforts:

1. We need to ask ourselves the questions, "What are you selling and who are you trying to sell to?" We need a "hook" (a short concise phrase) to get people interested.
2. The invitation to "Come plan the future of your city" was a good tool and had contributed to the success and high attendance at the kick-off meeting.
3. Although civic mindedness is one motivator, it should be remembered that appealing to people's self-interest is also an effective tool (i.e. convey how this affects their neighborhood or their street)
4. Those who are more affluent and educated will generally be aware of meetings, events the opportunities for involvement. Therefore, our outreach efforts need to focus more on disadvantaged communities.
5. The limited number of city staff makes it essential to effectively use ambassadors, volunteers and "packaged" information kiosks that can be manned by different groups
6. Citizens in disadvantaged areas often lack the confidence to speak and don't think their input is valued. Therefore, it takes a different form of communication to reach them and reassure them that their voice will be heard.
7. Ambassadors who are trusted by disadvantaged groups and neighborhoods will provide a key entrée to these citizens. We need to provide print materials in the appropriate language for their use as they go out into the community.
8. Press coverage of the city's outreach efforts would help convey the message that input from a broad cross section of the city is being sought.
9. The most recent census outreach efforts were very successful and provide a good resource for outreach ideas.
10. Other cities such as Charleston and Savannah were noted as having effective outreach programs.