

Village of Lawton Public Participation Plan

I. Purpose of the Public Participation Strategy

The purpose of this Public Participation Plan is to establish a clear, consistent, and inclusive framework for engaging residents, businesses, organizations, and other stakeholders in decisions that affect the Village of Lawton. This plan serves as a practical, living guide for Village officials and staff to proactively seek public input, increase transparency, and build trust within the community. The strategy is intended to be flexible, evolving over time to reflect community needs, changes in technology, and lessons learned.

This plan supports the Village's commitment to accountability, transparency, and meaningful civic engagement and may be incorporated into board and commission training, staff onboarding materials, and overall communication practices.

II. Applicable State and Local Regulations

Public participation activities conducted by the Village of Lawton shall comply with all applicable federal, state, and local laws. At a minimum, this includes adherence to:

- **Michigan Open Meetings Act (Public Act 267 of 1976):** Ensuring meetings are properly noticed, open to the public, and accessible.
 - All public meetings take place at **125 S. Main St., Lawton, MI 49065** unless otherwise posted.
 - Regular, special, and emergency meetings will be noticed in accordance with statutory requirements.
 - Any citizen may request to be placed on a meeting notification mailing list by contacting the Village Clerk at clerk@lawtonmi.org and specifying which agenda distribution list(s) they wish to receive.
- **Michigan Planning Enabling Act (Public Act 33 of 2008):** Governing public notice, hearings, and intergovernmental coordination related to planning activities.
- **Village of Lawton Ordinances and Policies:** Including local meeting procedures, notice requirements, and accessibility standards.

This plan is intended to exceed minimum legal requirements whenever possible by encouraging early, continuous, and inclusive public involvement.

III. Goals and Objectives

The Village of Lawton seeks to accomplish the following through its public participation efforts:

- Encourage early and continuous public involvement in planning, policy, and development decisions.
- Engage a broad and representative cross-section of the community, including groups that are historically underrepresented.
- Use multiple, equitable methods to share information and gather feedback.
- Provide clear, understandable educational materials that support informed participation.
- Ensure transparency by documenting and sharing public input and outcomes.
- Build staff and volunteer capacity to facilitate inclusive and respectful engagement.
- Continuously evaluate and improve public participation methods.

IV. Key Stakeholders

The Village recognizes that effective public participation requires outreach to a diverse range of stakeholders, including both those traditionally engaged and those who may not regularly participate. The Village will maintain and periodically update a stakeholder contact list to support inclusive engagement.

Draft Stakeholder Categories

Stakeholders may include, but are not limited to:

- Residents (including renters, homeowners, seniors, youth, and families)
- The community's largest employers
- Local businesses and business owners
- Downtown Development Authority (DDA)
- Local brokers and real estate professionals
- Neighborhood groups and homeowner associations
- Neighboring municipalities, including **Antwerp Township** and **Porter Township**
- Potential investors and developers
- Public employees and service providers (police, fire, health, education)
- Faith-based and religious organizations
- Senior groups and senior-serving organizations
- Social and civic organizations
- Students and youth-serving organizations
- Young professionals
- Newspapers and local media outlets
- Any other entities familiar with or invested in the community

Identifying and Including Stakeholders

To ensure broad and representative participation, the Village will use the following practices:

- **Stakeholder Mapping:** At the start of major projects, staff will identify which stakeholder categories are most affected and prioritize outreach accordingly.

- **Contact List Development:** The Village will maintain a centralized list of stakeholder contacts, updated through outreach, meeting sign-in sheets, partner organizations, and public requests.
- **Partnerships:** Existing organizations (schools, faith groups, employers, service agencies) may be asked to help distribute information or host engagement opportunities.
- **Targeted Outreach:** When appropriate, the Village will supplement general public notices with direct communication to relevant stakeholder groups.
- **Multiple Access Points:** Engagement opportunities will be offered through a mix of in-person, digital, and community-based settings to reduce barriers to participation.

The Village will periodically review stakeholder representation to identify gaps and improve outreach to underrepresented groups.

V. Communication and Engagement Toolbox

The Village will use a variety of engagement tools depending on the project type, timeline, and target audience. Methods may include:

- Public meetings and hearings
- Surveys (online and paper)
- Open houses and workshops
- Focus groups and stakeholder interviews
- Walking tours or site visits
- Participation at community events
- Digital communication (website, email, social media)
- Printed materials and mailings

For each project, staff will identify the most appropriate 2–3 engagement methods to balance effectiveness, inclusivity, and available resources.

VI. Identifying the Right Approach for a Project (Step 5)

To ensure consistent and effective public engagement, the Village will use the following **Engagement Approach Matrix** to determine the appropriate level and type of public participation for various project categories. This matrix is adapted from best practices and is intended to guide—not replace—professional judgment.

Legend

- **Required:** Minimum engagement method that must be used
- **Recommended:** Strongly encouraged based on project impact
- **Optional:** Used as appropriate based on scope, timing, or resources

Engagement Method	Master Plan	Zoning Amendments	Environmental Projects	CIP Planning	Parks & Recreation Planning	Major Developments
Pre-application meetings	Optional	Recommended	Optional	Optional	Optional	Required
Surveys	Recommended	Optional	Recommended	Recommended	Recommended	Optional
Open house meetings / workshops	Required	Recommended	Recommended	Recommended	Required	Required
Charrettes / design workshops	Recommended	Optional	Optional	Optional	Recommended	Recommended
Walking tours / site visits	Optional	Optional	Recommended	Optional	Recommended	Optional
One-on-one interviews	Optional	Optional	Recommended	Optional	Optional	Optional
Focus groups	Optional	Optional	Recommended	Optional	Optional	Optional
Digital communication tools	Required	Required	Required	Required	Required	Required
Outreach at local events	Optional	Optional	Optional	Optional	Recommended	Optional
News and media	Recommended	Optional	Recommended	Optional	Recommended	Recommended
Public hearing	Required	Required	Required	Required	Required	Required

This matrix will be reviewed periodically and adjusted based on effectiveness, community feedback, and resource availability.

VI. Communicating Results

The Village is committed to closing the feedback loop by sharing the results of public participation efforts. Depending on the engagement method, results may be communicated through:

- Village Council or board meetings
- The Village website

- Email newsletters
- Social media platforms
- Meeting minutes or summary reports

Clear timelines and staff responsibility for communicating results will be identified at the start of each engagement effort.

VII. Evaluation and Continuous Improvement

Public participation efforts will be documented and periodically evaluated to determine their effectiveness. Evaluation methods may include attendance tracking, surveys, informal feedback, and internal staff review.

At least annually, Village staff shall provide the Village Council with a summary of public participation activities conducted during the previous year. This summary may include engagement methods used, participation levels, major themes or outcomes, and opportunities for improvement.

This Public Participation Plan is intended to be reviewed annually and updated as necessary. Methods that are less effective will be documented and refined rather than discarded, ensuring continuous learning and improvement.

Closing Statement

The Village of Lawton affirms that meaningful public participation is essential to strong local governance, community trust, and successful implementation of plans and projects. This plan represents a commitment by Village leadership and staff to actively involve the community in shaping its future and to use public input as a vital part of decision-making.